THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

JULY
35c

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Kidnapping of Johnny Waverly
by AGATHA CHRISTIE

The Murder Trap
by WILLIAM MacHARG

Jim Hanvey Intervenes.
by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The Ingenuous Colonel
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Knows All: Tells All
by HORATIO WINSLOW

NO MOTIVE FOR MURDER
A BRAND-NEW NOVEL by CRAIG RICE

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

PROBABLY no living citizen has escaped being buttonholed at least once by a Proud Parent who insists on exhibiting snapshots of his offspring and recounting in nauseating detail the little beast's latest precocity, regardless of his captive audience's utter disinterest in the subject.

Okay, so this month I am taking the liberty of playing the Proud Parent. I managed to restrain the impulse last November, when the first issue of our British edition went on sale in England, and said nothing about it on this page. But now, as I look at the first copy of our French edition on my desk, I can no longer pretend a modesty which I do not feel.

As I write this (somewhat ahead of the publication date which you will find on the cover) it is barely the second anniversary of our first of all issues anywhere. And I think that to have gone so far towards becoming an international institution in such a short time is something to brag about.

Of course, as I said, this great news may well bore you to extinction. But I submit that it isn't quite as irrelevant as you might think at first. Because we are just human enough to get a large lift out of our own successes, and each step forward like that encourages us to try harder to make our next issue better than ever.

And if I were writing my own ticket for a celebratory number, I can hear myself saying, "Well, it'd be nice to be able to feature Craig Rice on the cover again with a brand-new novelet, preferably starring her best-beloved character John J. Malone, with his old antagonist Von Flanagan running interference for the police." So, believe it or not, in comes Craig Rice with a manuscript called NO MOTIVE FOR MURDER, in which Mr. Malone promptly has an inconvenient corpse to explain.

Then I would probably wish for some solid stand-bys like Agatha Christie with one of Hercule Poirot's brilliant feats of deduction, and for contrast a William MacHarg tale of the earthy shrewdness of his famous policeman O'Malley, and something slightly on the sentimental side to balance them, by some such master of the human touch as Octavus Roy Cohen.

So they came through, respectively, with THE KIDNAPPING OF JOHNNY WAVERLY, THE MURDER TRAP, and JIM HANVEY INTERVENES. And just for good measure, we have also grabbed and tossed in another brand-new story by Horatio Winslow, entitled KNOWS ALL: TELLS ALL.

There is also a revival called THE INGENUOUS COLONEL, by a guy who feels pretty lucky to be here.

Ellery Queen

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the ingenuous colonel

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Sir George's past was shockingly criminal. But Templar knew that a roguish wit could trim the odds to win—in a racetrack miracle.

LIEUT.-COLONEL Sir George Uppingdon, it must be admitted, was not a genuine knight; neither, as a matter of fact, was he a genuine colonel. This is not to say that he thought that sandbags contained the material for making mortar shells, or that an observation post was a species of flagpole on which inquisitive generals hung at half-mast. But his military experience was certainly limited to a brief period during the latter days of the war when conscription had gathered him up and set him to the uncongenial task of peeling potatoes at Aldershot.

Apart from that not inglorious interlude of strengthening the stomachs of the marching armies, his career had been far less impressive than the name he passed under seemed to indicate. Pentonville had housed him on one occasion, and he had also taken one short holiday at Maidstone.

Nevertheless, although the expensive public school which had taught him his practical arithmetic had long since erased his name from its register of alumni, he had never lost his well-educated and aristocratic

HERE IS THE SAINT IN A FABULOUS CHARACTER ROLE IN ONE OF THE ESCAPADES HIS DARING MADE FAMOUS

Copyright, 1934, by Leslie Charteris

From THE SAINT INTERVENES. Published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

bearing, and with the passing of time had added to it a magnificent pair of white moustachios which were almost as valuable to him in his career.

A slight tinge of the old-fashioned conservatism which characterized his style of dress clung equally limpet-like to the processes of his mind.

"These new-fangled stunts are all very well," he said doggedly. "But what happens to them? You work them once, and they receive a great deal of publicity, and then you can never use them again. How many of them will last as long as our tried and proved old friends?"

His companion on that occasion, an equally talented Mr. Sidney Immelbern—whose real name, as it happens, was Sidney Immelbern—regarded him gloomily.

"That's the trouble with you, George," he said. "It's the one thing which has kept you back from real greatness. You can't get it into your head that we've got to move with the times."

"It has also kept me out of a great deal of trouble," said the Colonel sedately. "If I remember rightly, Sid, when you last moved with the times, it was to Wormwood Scrubs."

Mr. Immelbern frowned. There were seasons when he felt that George Uppingdon's gentlemanly bearing had no real foundations of good taste.

"Well," he retorted, "your methods haven't made us millionaires. Here it's nearly two months since we made a touch, and we only got eight hundred from that Australian at Brighton."

Mr. Immelbern's terse statement being irrefutable, and a long and somewhat melancholy silence settled down upon the partnership.

Even by the elastic standards of the world in which they moved, it was an unusual combination. Mr. Sidney Immelbern had none of the Colonel's distinguished style—he was a stocky man with an unrefined and slightly oriental face, who affected check tweeds of more than dashing noisiness and had an appropriate air of smelling faintly of stables.

But they had worked excellently together in the past, and only in such rare but human excesses of recrimination as that which has just been recorded did they fail to share a sublime confidence that their team technique would shine undimmed in brilliance through the future, as and when the opportunity arose.

The unfortunate part was that the opportunity did not arise. For close upon eight weeks it had eluded them with a relentlessness which savored of actual malice. True, there had been an American at the Savoy who had seemed a hopeful proposition,

but he had turned out to be one of those curious people who sincerely disapprove of gambling on principle; and an equally promising leather merchant from Leicester had been recalled home by an ailing wife a few hours before they would have made their kill.

The profession of confidence man requires capital—he must maintain a good appearance, invest lavishly in food and wine, and be able to wait for his profits. It was not surprising that Messrs. Uppingdon and Immelbern should watch the dwindling of their resources with alarm, and at times give way to moments of spleen which in more prosperous days would never have smirched their mutual friendship.

But with almost sadistic glee their opportunity continued to elude them. The lounge of the Palace Royal Hotel, where they sat sipping their expensive drinks, was a scene of life and gaiety; but the spirit of the place was not reflected in their faces. Among the lunch-time cocktail crowd of big business men, young well-groomed men, and all their chosen women, there appeared not one lonely soul with the unmistakable air of a forlorn stranger in the city whom they might tactfully accost, woo from his glum solitude with lunch and friendship, and in due course mulct of a contribution to their exchequer proportionate to his means. Fortune, they felt, had deserted them forever. Nobody loved them.

"It is," admitted Lieut.-Colonel Uppingdon, breaking the silence, "pretty bloody."

"It is," concurred Mr. Immelbern, and suddenly scowled at him. "What's that?" he added.

Somewhat vaguely, the Colonel was inclining his head. But the remarkable point was that he was not looking at Mr. Immelbern.

"What is what?" he inquired, making sure of his ground.

"What's that you're staring at with that silly look on your face?" said Mr. Immelbern testily.

"That young fellow who just came in," explained the Colonel. "He seemed to know me."

Mr. Immelbern glanced over the room. The only man whom he was able to bring within the limits of his partner's rather unsatisfactory description was just then sitting down at a table by himself a few places away—a lean and somehow dangerous-looking young man with a keen tanned face and very clear blue eyes. Instinctively Mr. Immelbern groped around for his hat.

"D'you mean he's a fellow you swindled once?" he demanded hastily.

Uppingdon shook his head. "Oh, no. I'm positive about that. Besides, he smiled at me quite

pleasantly. But I can't remember him at all."

Mr. Immelbern relaxed slowly. He looked at the young man again with diminished apprehension. And gradually, decisively, a certain simple deduction registered itself in his practiced mind.

The young man had money. There was no deception about that. Everything about him pointed unobtrusively but unequivocally towards that one cardinal fact. His clothes, immaculately kept, had the unostentatious seal of Savile Row on every stitch of them. His silk shirt had the cachet of St. James's. His shoes, brightly polished and unspotted by the stains of traffic, could never have been anything but custom made.

He had just given his order to the waiter, and while he waited for it to arrive he was selecting a cigarette from a thin case which to the lay eye might have been silver, but which Mr. Immelbern knew beyond all doubt was platinum.

There are forms of instinct which soar beyond all physical explanations into the clear realms of clairvoyance. The homing pigeon wings its way across sightless space to the old roost. The Arabian camel finds the waterhole, and the pig detects the subterranean truffle. Even thus was the clairvoyance of Mr. Immelbern.

If there was one thing on earth which he could track down it was money. The affinity of the pigeon for its roost, the camel for the water-hole, the pig for the truffle, were as nothing to the affinity of Mr. Immelbern for dough. He was in tune with it. Its subtle emanations floated through the ether and impinged on psychic antennae in his system which operated on a superheterodyne circuit.

And while he looked at the young man who seemed to know Lieut.-Colonel Uppingdon, that circuit was oscillating over all its tubes. He summarized his conclusions with an explicit economy of verbiage which La Bruyère could not have pruned by a single syllable.

"He's rich," said Mr. Immelbern.

"I wish I could remember where I met him," said the Colonel, frowning over his own train of thought. "I hate to forget a face."

"You doddering old fool!" snarled Mr. Immelbern, smiling at him affectionately. "What do I care about your memory? The point is that he's rich, and he seemed to recognize you. Well, that saves a lot of trouble, doesn't it?"

The Colonel turned towards him and blinked. "What do you mean?"

"Will you never wake up?" moaned Mr. Immelbern, extend-

ing his cigarette-case with every appearance of affability. "Here you've been sitting whining and moping for half an hour because we don't get a chance to make a touch, and when a chance does come along you can't see it. What do I care where you met the man? What do I care if you never met him? He nodded to you, and he's sitting two yards away—and you ask me what I mean!"

The Colonel frowned at him for a moment. He was, as we have explained, a born traditionalist. He never allowed himself to be carried away. He deliberated. He calculated. He explored. He would, but for the ever-present stimulus of Mr. Immelbern, have done as little as any other traditionalist.

But gradually the frown faded, and a dignified smile took its place. "There may be something in what you say, Sid," he conceded.

"Go on," ordered Mr. Immelbern crudely. "Hop it. And try to wake your ideas up a bit. If somebody threw a purse into your lap, you'd be asking me what it was."

Lieut.-Colonel Uppingdon gave him an aristocratically withering look, and rose sedately from the table. He went over to where the young man sat and coughed discreetly.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, and the young man looked up from his idle study of the afternoon's runners at Sandown Park. "You must have thought me a trifle rude just now."

"Not at all," said the young man amiably. "I thought you were busy and didn't want to be bothered. How are things these days, George?"

The Colonel suppressed a start. The use of his Christian name implied an intimacy that was almost alarming, but the young man's pleasant features still struck no responsive chord in his memory.

"To tell you the truth," he said. "I'm afraid my eyes are not as good as they were. I didn't recognize you until you had gone by. Dear me! How long is it since I saw you last?"

The young man thought for a moment. "Was it at Biarritz about ten years ago?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Uppingdon delightedly—he had never been to Biarritz in his life. "By Gad, how the time does fly! I never thought I should have to ask when I last saw *you,* my dear—"

He broke off short, and an expression of shocked dismay overspread his face.

"Good Gad!" he blurted. "You'll begin to think there's something the matter with me. Have you ever had a lapse of memory like that? I had your name on the tip of my tongue—I was just going to say it—and

it slipped off! Wait—don't help me—didn't it begin with H?"

"I'm afraid not," said the young man pleasantly.

"Not either of your names?" pursued the Colonel hopefully.

"No."

"Then it must have been J."

"No."

"I mean T."

The young man nodded.

Uppingdon took heart. "Let me see. Tom — Thomson — Travers — Terrington —"

The other smiled. "I'd better save you the trouble. Templar's the name—Simon Templar."

Uppingdon put a hand to his head.

"I knew it!" He was certain that he had never met anyone named Simon Templar. "How stupid of me! My dear chap, I hardly know how to apologize. Damned bad form, not even being able to remember a fellow's name. Look here, you must give me a chance to put it right. What about joining us for a drink? Or are you waiting for somebody?"

Simon Templar shook his head.

"Splendid!" said the Colonel. "Splendid! Perfectly splendid!" He seized the young man's arm and led him across to where Mr. Immelbern waited. "By Gad, what a perfectly splendid coincidence. Simon, you must meet Mr. Immelbern. Sidney, this is an old friend of mine, Mr. Templar. By Gad!"

Simon found himself ushered into the best chair, his drink paid for, his health proposed and drunk with every symptom of cordiality.

"By Gad!" said the Colonel, mopping his brow and beaming.

"Quite a coincidence, Mr. Templar," remarked Immelbern, absorbing the word into his vocabulary.

"Coincidence is a marvelous thing," said the Colonel. "I remember when I was in Allahabad with the West Nottinghams, they had a quartermaster whose wife's name was Ellen. As a matter of fact, he wasn't really our quartermaster—we borrowed him from the Southwest Kents. Rotten regiment, the Southwest Kents. Old General Plushbottom was with them before he was thrown out of the service. His name wasn't really Plushbottom, but we called him Old General Plushbottom.

"The thing was a frightful scandal. He had a fight with a subaltern on the parade-ground at Poona—as a matter of fact, it was almost on the very spot where Reggie Carfew dropped dead of heart failure the day after his wife ran away with a bank clerk. And the extraordinary thing was that her name was Ellen too."

"Extraordinary," agreed the young man.

"Extraordinary!" concurred

Mr. Immelbern, and trod viciously on Uppingdon's toe under the table.

"That was a marvelous trip we had on the *Bremen*—I mean to Biarritz—wasn't it?" said the Colonel, wincing.

Simon Templar smiled. "We had some good parties, didn't we?"

"By Gad! And the casino!"

"The Heliopolis!"

"The races!" said the Colonel, seizing his cue almost too smartly, and moving his feet quickly out of range of Mr. Immelbern's heavy heel.

Mr. Immelbern gave an elaborate start. He pulled a watch from his waistcoat pocket and looked at it accusingly.

"By the way, Sir George," he interrupted with a faintly conspiratorial air. "I don't want to put you out at all, but it's getting a bit late."

"Late?" repeated the Colonel, frowning at him.

"You know," said Mr. Immelbern mysteriously.

"Oh," said the Colonel, grasping the point.

Mr. Immelbern turned to Simon.

"I'm really not being rude, Mr. Templar," he explained, "but Sir George has important business to attend to this afternoon, and I had to remind him about it. Really, Sir George, don't think I'm butting in, but it goes at two o'clock, and if we're going to get any lunch—"

"But that's outrageous!" protested the Colonel indignantly. "I've only just brought Mr. Templar over to our table, and you're suggesting that I should rush off and leave him!"

"Please don't bother about me," said Simon hastily. "If you have business to do—"

"My dear chap, I insist on bothering. The whole idea is absurd. I've put far too great a strain on your good nature already. This is preposterous. You must certainly join us in another drink. And in lunch. It's the very least I can do."

Mr. Immelbern did not look happy. He gave the impression of a man torn between politeness and frantic necessity, frustrated by having to talk in riddles, and perhaps pardonably exasperated by the obtuseness of his companion.

"But really, Sir George—"

"That's enough," said the Colonel, raising his hand. "I refuse to listen to anything more. Mr. Templar is an old friend of mine, and my guarantee should be good enough for you. And as far as you are concerned, my dear chap," he added, turning to Simon, "if you are not already engaged for lunch, I won't hear any other excuse."

Simon shrugged. "It's very kind of you. But if I'm in the way—"

"That," said the Colonel pon-

tifically, "will do." He consulted his watch, drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the table for a moment, and said: "The very thing! We'll go right along to my rooms, and I'll have some lunch served there. Then Mr. Immelbern and I can do our business as well without being rushed."

"But Sir George!" said Immelbern imploringly. "Won't you listen to reason? Look here, can I speak to you alone for a minute? Mr. Templar will excuse us."

He grabbed the spluttering Colonel by the arm and dragged him away almost by main force. They retreated to the other end of the lounge.

"We'll get him," said the Colonel, gesticulating furiously.

"I know," said Mr. Immelbern, beating his fist on the palm of his hand. "That is, if you don't scare him off with that imitation of a colonel. That stuff's so corny it makes me want to scream. Have you found out who he is?"

"No. I don't even recognize his name."

"Probably he's mistaken you for somebody else," said Mr. Immelbern, appearing to sulk.

The Colonel turned away from him and marched back to the table, with Mr. Immelbern following him glumly.

"Well, that's settled, by Gad," he said breezily. "If you've finished your drink, my dear fellow, we'll get along at once."

They went in a taxi to the Colonel's apartment, a small suite at the lower end of Clarges Street. Uppingdon burbled on with engaging geniality, but Mr. Immelbern kept his mouth tightly closed and wore the look of a man suffering from toothache.

"How about some caviar sandwiches and a bottle of wine?" suggested the Colonel. "I can fix those up myself. Or if you'd prefer something more substantial, I can easily have it sent in."

"Caviar sandwiches will do for me," murmured Simon accommodatingly.

There was plenty of caviar, and some excellent sherry to pass the time while the Colonel was preparing the sandwiches. The wine was impeccable, and the quantity apparently unlimited. Under its soothing influence even the morose Mr. Immelbern seemed to thaw slightly, although towards the end of the meal he kept looking at his watch and comparing it anxiously with the clock on the mantelpiece.

At a quarter to two he caught his partner's eye in one of the rare lulls in the Colonel's meandering flow of reminiscence.

"Well, Sir George," he said grimly, "if you can spare the time now—"

"Of course," said the Colonel brightly.

Mr. Immelbern looked at their guest, and hesitated again.

"Er—to deal with our business."

Simon put down his glass and rose quickly. "I'll leave you to it," he said pleasantly. "Really, I've imposed on you quite long enough."

"Sit down, my dear chap, sit down," commanded the Colonel testily. "Dammit, Sidney, your suspicions are becoming ridiculous. If you go on in this way I shall begin to believe you suffer from delusions of persecution. I've already told you that Mr. Templar is an old friend of mine, by Gad, and it's an insult to a guest in my house to suggest that you can't trust him. Anything we have to discuss can be said in front of him."

"But think, Sir George. Think of the risk."

"Nonsense," snorted the Colonel. "It's all in your imagination. In fact"—the idea suddenly appeared to strike him—"I'm damned if I don't tell him what it's all about."

Mr. Immelbern opened his mouth, closed it again, and sank back wearily without speaking. His attitude implied that he had already exhausted himself in vain appeals to an obvious lunatic, and he was beginning to realize that it was of no avail. He could do no more.

"It's like this, my dear chap," said the Colonel, ignoring him. "All that this mystery amounts to—all that Immelbern here is so frightened of telling you—is that we are professional gamblers. We back racehorses."

"That isn't all of it," contradicted Mr. Immelbern sullenly.

"Well, we have certain advantages. I, in my social life, am very friendly with a large number of racehorse owners. Mr. Immelbern is friendly with trainers and jockeys. Between the two of us, we sometimes have infallible information, the result of piecing together everything we hear from various sources, of times when the result of a certain race has positively been arranged. Then all we have to do is to make our bets and collect the money. That happens to be our business this afternoon. We have an absolutely certain winner for two o'clock race at Sandwon Park, and in a few minutes we shall be backing it."

Mr. Immelbern closed his eyes as if he could endure no more.

"That seems quite harmless," said Templar.

"Of course it is," agreed the Colonel. "What Immelbern is so frightened of is that somebody will discover what we're doing—I mean that it might come to the knowledge of some of our friends who are owners or trainers or jockeys, and then our sources of information would be cut off. But, by Gad, I insist on the privilege of being allowed to

know when I can trust my own friends."

"Well, I won't give you away," Simon told him obligingly.

The Colonel turned to Immelbern triumphantly.

"There you are! So there's no need whatever for our little party to break up yet, unless Mr. Templar has an engagement. Our business will be done in a few minutes. By Gad, damme, I think you owe Mr. Templar an apology!"

Mr. Immelbern sighed, stared at his fingernails for a while in grumpy silence, and consulted his watch again.

"It's nearly five to two," he said. "How much can we get on?"

"About a thousand, I think," said the Colonel judiciously.

Mr. Immelbern got up and went to the telephone, where he dialed a number.

"This is Immelbern," he said, in the voice of a martyr responding to the curtain call for the lion-wrestling event. "I want two hundred pounds on Greenfly."

He heard his bet repeated, pressed down the hook, and dialed again.

"We have to spread it around to try and keep the starting price from shortening," explained the Colonel.

Simon Templar nodded, and leaned back with his eyes half-closed, listening to the click and tinkle of the dial and Immelbern's afflicted voice. Five times the process was repeated, and during the giving of the fifth order Uppingdon interrupted again.

"Make it two-fifty this time, Sidney," he said.

Mr. Immelbern said: "Just a moment, will you hold on?" to the transmitter, covered it with his hand, and turned aggrievedly.

"I thought you said a thousand. That makes a thousand and fifty."

"Well, I thought Mr. Templar might like to have fifty on."

Simon hesitated. "That's about all I've got on me," he said.

"Don't let that bother you, my dear boy," boomed Colonel Uppingdon. "Your credit's good with me, and I feel that I owe you something to compensate for what you've put up with. Make it a hundred if you like."

"But Sir George!" wailed Mr. Immelbern.

"Dammit, will you stop whining 'But Sir George!'?" exploded the Colonel. "That settles it. Make it three hundred—that will be a hundred on for Mr. Templar. And if the horse doesn't win I'll stand the loss myself."

A somewhat strained silence prevailed after the last bet had been made. Mr. Immelbern sat down again and chewed the unlighted end of a cigar in morbid meditations. The Colonel twid-

dled his thumbs as if the embarrassment of these recurrent disputes was hard to shake off. Simon Templar lighted a cigarette and smoked calmly.

"Have you been doing this long?" he inquired.

"For about two years," said the Colonel. "By Gad, though, we've made money at it. Only about one horse in ten that we back doesn't romp home, and most of 'em are at good prices. Sometimes our money does get back to the course and spoil the price, but I'd rather have a winner at evens than a loser at ten to one any day. Why, I remember one race meeting we had at Delhi. That was the year when old Stubby Featherstone dropped his cap in the Ganges—he was the fella who got killed at Cambrai . . ."

He launched off on another wandering reminiscence, and Simon listened to him with polite attention. He had some thinking to do, and he was grateful for the gallant Colonel's willingness to take all the strain of conversation away from him. Mr. Immelbern chewed his cigar in chronic pessimism until half an hour had passed; and then he glanced at his watch again, started up, and broke into the middle of one of his host's rambling sentences.

"The result ought to be through by now," he said abruptly. "Shall we go out and get a paper?"

Simon stood up unhurriedly. He had done his thinking. "Let me go," he suggested.

"That's awfully good of you, my dear boy. Mr. Immelbern would have gone. Never mind, by Gad. Go out and see how much you've won. I'll open another bottle. Damme, we must have a drink on this, by Gad!"

Simon grinned and sauntered out; and as the doors closed behind him the eyes of the two partners met.

"Next time you say 'damme' or 'by Gad,' George," said Mr. Immelbern, "I will knock your block off, so help me. Why don't you get some new ideas?"

But by that time Lieut.-Colonel Sir George Uppingdon was beyond taking offense.

"We've got him," he said gleefully.

"I hope so," said Mr. Immelbern, more cautiously.

"I know what I'm talking about, Sid," said the Colonel stubbornly. "He's a serious young fellow, one of these conservative chaps like myself—but that's the best kind. None of this dashing around, keeping up with the times, going off like a firework and fizzling out like a pricked balloon. I'll bet you anything you like, in another hour he'll be looking around for a thousand pounds to give us to put on tomorrow's certainty. His kind starts slowly, but it goes a lot

further than any of you high-pressure Smart Alecs."

Mr. Immelbern made a rude noise.

Simon Templar bought a *Star* at Devonshire House and turned without anxiety to the stop press. Greenfly had won the two o'clock at five to one.

As he strolled back towards Clarges Street he was smiling. It was a peculiarly ecstatic sort of smile; and as a matter of fact he had volunteered to go out and buy the paper, even though he knew what the result would be as certainly as Messrs. Uppingdon and Immelbern knew it, for the sole and sufficient reason that he wanted to give that smile the freedom of his face and let it walk around. To have been compelled to sit around any longer in Uppingdon's apartment and sustain the necessary mask of gravity and sober interest without a breathing spell would have sprained every muscle within six inches of his mouth.

"Hullo, Saint," said a familiar sleepy voice beside him.

A hand touched his arm, and he turned quickly to see a big baby-faced man in a bowler hat of unfashionable shape, whose jaws moved rhythmically like those of a ruminating cow.

"Hush," said the Saint. "Somebody might hear."

"Is there anybody left who doesn't know?" asked Chief Inspector Teal sardonically.

Simon Templar nodded slowly.

"Strange as it may seem, there is. Believe it or not, Claud Eustace, somewhere in this great city—I wouldn't tell you where, for anything—there are left two trusting souls who don't even recognize my name. They have just come down from their hermits' caves in the mountains of Ladbroke Grove, and they haven't yet heard the news.

"The Robin Hood of modern crime," said the Saint oratorically, "the scourge of the ungodly, the defender of the faith—what *are* the newspaper headlines?—has come back to raise hell over the length and breadth of England—and they don't know."

"You look much too happy," said the detective suspiciously. "Who are these fellows?"

"Their names are Uppingdon and Immelbern, if you want to know—and you've probably met them before. They have special information about racehorses, and I am playing my usual role of the Sucker who does not Suck too long. At the moment they owe me five hundred quid."

Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal's baby blue eyes looked him over thoughtfully. And in Chief Inspector Teal's mind there were no illusions. He did not share the ignorance of Messrs. Uppingdon and Immelbern. He had known the Saint for many years, and had heard that he was back.

He knew that there was going

to be a fresh outbreak of buccaneering through the fringes of London's underworld, exactly as there had been so many times before; he knew that the feud between them was going to start again, the endless battle between the gay outlaw and the guardian of the Law; and he knew that his troubles were at the beginning of a new lease of life. And yet one of his rare smiles touched his mouth for a fleeting instant.

"See that they pay you," he said, and went on his portly and lethargic way.

Simon Templar went back to the apartment on Clarges Street. Uppingdon let him in; and even the melancholy Mr. Immelbern was moved to jump up as they entered the living room.

"Did it win?" they chorused.

The Saint held out the paper. It was seized, snatched from hand to hand, and lowered reverently while an exchange of rapturous glances took place across its columns.

"At five to one," breathed Lieut.-Colonel Uppingdon.

"Five thousand quid," whispered Mr. Immelbern.

"The seventh winner in succession."

"Eighty thousand quid in four weeks."

The Colonel turned to Simon.

"What a pity you only had a hundred pounds on," he said, momentarily crestfallen. Then the solution struck him, and he brightened. "But how ridiculous! We can easily put that right. On our next coup, you shall be an equal partner. Immelbern, be silent! I have put up with enough interference from you. Templar, my dear boy, if you care to come in with me next time—"

The Saint shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mind a small gamble now and again, but for business I only bet on certainties."

"But this is a certainty!" cried the Colonel.

Simon frowned. "Nothing," he said gravely, "is a certainty until you know the result. A horse may drop dead, or fall down, or be disqualified. The risk may be small, but it exists. I eliminate it." He gazed at them suddenly with a sober intensity which almost held them spellbound. "It sounds silly," he said, "but I happen to be psychic."

The two men stared back at him.

"Wha — what?" stammered the Colonel.

"What does that mean?" demanded Mr. Immelbern, more grossly.

"I am clairvoyant," said the Saint simply. "I can foretell the future. For instance, I can look over the list of runners in a newspaper and close my eyes, and suddenly I'll see the winners printed out in my mind, just as if I was looking at the evening

edition. I don't know how it's done. It's a gift. My mother had it."

The two men were gaping at him dubiously. They were incredulous, wondering if they were missing a joke and ought to laugh politely; and yet something in the Saint's voice and the slight uncanny widening of his eyes sent a cold supernatural draught creeping up their spines.

"Haw!" ejaculated the Colonel uncertainly, feeling that he was called upon to make some sound; and the Saint smiled distantly. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Let me show you. I wasn't going to make any bets today, but since I've started I may as well go on."

He picked up his lunch edition, which he had been reading in the Palace Royal lounge, and studied the racing entries on the back page. Then he put down the paper and covered his eyes. For several seconds there was a breathless silence, while he stood there with his head in his hands, swaying slightly, in an attitude of terrific concentration.

Again the supernatural shiver went over the two partners; and then the Saint straightened up suddenly, opened his eyes, and rushed to the telephone.

He dialed his number rather slowly. He had watched the movements of Mr. Immelbern's fingers closely, on every one of the gentleman's five calls; and his keen ears had listened and calculated every click of the returning dial. It would not be his fault if he got the wrong number.

The receiver at the other end of the line was lifted. The voice spoke.

"Baby Face," it said hollowly.

Simon Templar drew a deep breath, and a gigantic grin of bliss deployed itself over his inside. But outwardly he did not bat an eyelid.

"Two hundred pounds on Baby Face for Mr. Templar," he said; and the partners were too absorbed with other things to notice that he spoke in a very fair imitation of Mr. Immelbern's deep rumble.

He turned back to them, smiling. "Baby Face," he said, with the quietness of absolute certitude, "will win the three o'clock race at Sandown Park."

Lieut.-Colonel Uppingdon fingered his superb white moustachios.

"By Gad!" he said.

Half an hour later the three of them went out together for a newspaper. Baby Face had won —at ten to one.

"Haw!" said the Colonel, blinking at the result rather dazedly.

On the face of Mr. Immelbern was a look of almost superstitious awe. It is difficult to convey what was in his mind at that moment.

Throughout his life he had dreamed of such things. Horseflesh was the one true love of his unromantic soul. The fashions of Newmarket ruled his clothes, the scent of stables hung around him like a subtle perfume; he might, in prosperous times, have been a rich man in his illegal way, if all his private profits had not inevitably gravitated on to the backs of unsuccessful horses as fast as they came into his pocket.

And in the secret daydreams which coil through even the most phlegmatic bosom had always been the wild impossible idea that if by some miracle he could have the privilege of reading the next day's results every day for a week, he could make himself a fortune that would free him for the rest of his life from the sordid labors of the confidence game and give him the leisure to perfect that infallible racing system with which he had been experimenting ever since adolescence.

And now the miracle had come to pass, in the person of that debonair and affluent young man who did not even seem to realize the potential millions which lay in his strange gift.

"Can you do that every day?" he asked huskily.

"Oh, yes," said the Saint.

"In every race?" said Mr. Immelbern hoarsely.

"Why not?" said the Saint. "It makes racing rather a bore, really, and you soon get tired of picking up the money."

Mr. Immelbern gulped. He could not conceive what it felt like to get tired of picking up money. He felt stunned.

"Well," said the Saint casually, "I'd better be buzzing along—"

At the sound of those words something came over Lieut.-Colonel Sir George Uppingdon. It was, in its way, the turning of a worm. He had suffered much. The gibes of Mr. Immelbern still rankled in his sedate aristocratic breast. And Mr. Immelbern was still goggling in a half-witted daze—he who had boasted almost naggingly of his accessibility to new ideas.

Lieut.-Colonel Sir George Uppingdon took the Saint's arm, gently but very firmly.

"Just a minute, my dear boy," he said, rolling the words succulently round his tongue. "We must not be old-fashioned. We must move with the times. This psychic gift of yours is truly remarkable. There's a fortune in it. Damme, if somebody threw a purse into Immelbern's lap, he'd be asking me what it was. Thank God, I'm not so dense as that, by Gad. My dear Mr. Templar, my dear boy, you must—I positively insist—you must come back to my rooms and talk about what you're going to do with this gift of yours. By Gad!"

Mr. Immelbern did not come

out of his trance until halfway through the bargaining that followed.

It was nearly two hours later when the two partners struggled somewhat short-windedly up the stairs to a dingy one-roomed office off the Strand. Its furniture consisted of a chair, a table with a telephone on it, and a tape machine in one corner. It had not been swept for weeks, but it served its purpose adequately.

The third and very junior member of the partnership sat on the chair with his feet on the table, smoking a limp cigarette and turning the pages of *Paris Plaisirs*. He looked up in some surprise not unmixed with alarm at the noisy entrance of his confederates—a pimply youth with a chin that barely contrived to separate his mouth from his sallow neck.

"I've made our fortunes!" yelled Mr. Immelbern, and, despite the youth's repulsive aspect, embraced him.

A slight frown momentarily marred the Colonel's glowing benevolence.

"What d'you mean—*you've* made our fortunes?" he demanded. "If it hadn't been for me—"

"Well, what the hell does it matter?" said Mr. Immelbern. "In a couple of months we'll all be millionaires."

"How?" asked the pimply youth blankly.

Mr. Immelbern broke off in the middle of an improvised hornpipe.

"It's like this," he explained exuberantly. "We've got a sike —sidekick—"

"Psychic," said the Colonel.

"A bloke who can tell the future. He puts his hands over his eyes and reads the winners off like you'd read them out of a paper. He did it four times this afternoon. We're going to take him in with us. We had a job to persuade him—he was going off to the South of France tonight—can you imagine it, a bloke with a gift like that going away while there's any racing here? We had to give him five hundred quid advance on the money we told him we were going to make for him to make him put it off. But it's worth it. We'll start tomorrow, and if this fellow Templar—"

"Ow, that's 'is nime, is it?" said the pimply youth brightly. "I wondered wot was goin' on."

There was a short puzzled silence.

"How do you mean—what was going on?" asked the Colonel at length.

"Well, said the pimply youth, "when Sid was ringing up all the afternoon, practic'ly every rice—"

"What d'you mean?" croaked Mr. Immelbern. "*I* rang up every race?"

"Yus, an' I was givin' you the winners, an' you were sayin'

'Two 'undred pounds on Baby Face for Mr. Templar'—'Four 'undred pounds on Cellophane for Mr. Templar'—gettin' bigger an' bigger all the time an' never givin' 'im a loser—well, I started to wonder wot was 'appening."

The silence that followed was longer, much longer; and there were things seething in it for which the English language has no words.

It was the Colonel who broke it.

"It's impossible," he said dizzily. "I know the clock was slow, because I put it back myself, but I only put it back five minutes, and this fellow was telephoning ten minutes before the times of the races."

"Then 'e must 'ave put it back some more while you wasn't watchin' 'im," said the pimply youth stolidly.

The idea penetrated after several awful seconds.

"By Gad!" said Lieut.-Colonel Sir George Uppingdon in a feeble voice.

Mr. Immelbern did not speak. He was removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves, with his eyes riveted yearningly on the Colonel's aristocratic block.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT

will be

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
with "The Golden Frog"

DAMON RUNYON,
with "Johnny One-Eye"

C. S. FORESTER,
with "The Turn of the Tide"

VAN WYCK MASON,
with "Port of Peril"

SAX ROHMER,
with "The Potsherd of Anubis"

CHRISTOPHER BUSH,
with "The Hampstead Murder"

and many others

the double triangle

by . . . Myron David Orr

Anthropologist-detective Archie finds Death's deep roots in two triangles with a single fatal apex.

ARCHIBALD SYLVESTER BREWSTER McCann wiped the perspiration from his thin face as he entered the Mandarin Cafe in Marienberg, New Guinea. The weather in the Sepic River district was occasionally delightful, but most of the time it was hot, humid and nearly unbearable for the white inhabitants who lived in the city, and on the ranches in the jungle along the sluggish river.

McCann waved a friendly greeting to Shanghai Nell as he slouched down on the hard bench in the small cubicle at the rear of the smoke-filled dining room. Nell sat down opposite him, and rested her arms on the narrow table.

"Sweet and spareribs?" she asked, with an enigamtic smile. "Or has French given you a new assignment?"

No one knew how old Nell was, but she was much older than she appeared to be. McCann was genuinely fond of her because she was not the marrying kind, and Nell likèd McCann, because he was too indolent to

When Oliver Twist asked for more we've a time-defying suspicion it wasn't oatenmeal he was thinking of, but an Archie McCann mystery. Certainly when Myron David Orr created Archie there must have been a slight rustling of laurels at a certain address in London where Baker Street was formerly situated, or even by the phantom oaks where once strolled Father Brown.

take her seriously. Nell knew about everything that went on in Marienberg, and gave McCann many tips which resulted in a quick solution of crimes, attributed many times by the police to clairvoyance on her part.

"Assignment—no." McCann grinned and patted her hands. "Spareribs—yes. Did anyone tell you that you are sometimes the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"Only you, liar!" she laughed. "Come on, get it off your chest! What's bothering you?"

McCann frowned thoughtfully. "Do you know a fellow by the name of Kau Kim?" he asked.

"Uh huh," she admitted curiously.

"Heard what happened to him?"

She nodded, her eyes searching his face.

"French tells me he killed John Simpson," McCann said.

"Do you believe Commissioner French?"

"No."

"You've proved him wrong before," Nell said quietly.

"What do you mean by that?" asked McCann quickly.

"Kim's the goat," said Nell. "Did you ever hear of a double-triangle?"

"I don't get you."

"Two men and two women," smiled Nell enigmatically, and got up from the table. "I'll get your spareribs," she added. "Think that one over until I return."

McCann was aware of the well-worn expression "eternal triangle." But he had never heard of a *double triangle.* He wondered how a double triangle could have anything to do with Simpson and Kim.

French had given him the facts of the case. Simpson, Kim and Frank Mason, the company's attorney and treasurer, had been golfing and had returned to Mason's house in the outskirts of Marienberg. They had tarried in the library for whiskeys-and-sodas before going to dress for the annual dinner and meeting of the company stockholders. Mason had gone upstairs to take a shower, and Kim and Simpson had remained in the library where the houseboy had served them.

Later the houseboy, while passing along the hall outside the library, heard a shot in the library. He broke into the room and found Simpson on the floor with Kim bending over him. Terrified, the boy rushed upstairs and pounded on the door of Mason's room. Mason was taking a shower, and singing loudly. The boy had quite a time in making himself heard above the noise of the shower and Mason's singing.

When the boy's pounding and shouting finally brought Mason

to the door, he told the attorney what had happened. Mason quickly threw a bathrobe around himself, and hurried down to the library. Simpson was dead. He had been shot in the forehead.

Mason called the police and Kim was arrested because he was the only person in the room at the time of the shot, and two other servants who had seen the houseboy in the hall. Mason was the one who suggested the motive for the crime, and who told the police about Kim's argument with Simpson over Kim's daughter.

The police searched the room and found the gun stuffed into the springs of a settee in the library. However, there were no fingerprints on it.

It was the kind of crime that appealed strongly to McCann. McCann was thirty-five years old, six feet three in his stocking feet and as thin as a rail. His propensities were gastronomical and occasionally amatory, modified by his hunger for sweet and sour pork, and his desire for companionship with Shanghai Nell . . .

Nell had a wealth of information concerning the unconventional activities of shady characters in the district who used murder and mayhem to gain their objectives in preference to honest labor and McCann had naturally turned to her when he needed information concerning the murder of John Simpson, one of the chief white residents of Marienberg.

Jason French, the Commissioner of Native Affairs had told him that Kau Kim, a native who was a very good friend of McCann's, had been arrested for the murder. McCann had expressed his disbelief in emphatic terms. But French had assured him that there could be no question about Kim's guilt. Kim had admitted having a violent argument with Simpson over the latter's extramarital relations with Kim's daughter. Quite as important, Kim had been the only person in the room at the time.

McCann had known Kim for many years. He was a native who had been educated in the Government schools at Port Moresby, and occupied the position of head bookkeeper for the Copra Trading Corporation, of which Simpson was the president. Simpson was an Eurasian; his father a Portuguese, his mother Chinese.

John Simpson's father had founded the Copra Trading Company, and when Simpson had inherited the business he had married the junior partner of the company—a woman twice his age who had spent most of her time in European capitals. It was common gossip that their marriage had never been consummated. McCann liked Kim and disliked Simpson. He couldn't believe that Kim had killed

Simpson—it just wasn't logical!

While in High School, McCann had made up his mind to become a doctor, but after analyzing the profession had decided that it was a too strenuous one for his indolent nature. He then decided to become a lawyer, and after practicing for two years found that it caused him to be in a mental turmoil most of his waking hours. McCann hated arguments and unnecessary chin exercises.

He finally decided to give up the practice of law and find a job that required the minimum amount of mental as well as physical exertion. After making a careful survey of many occupations he decided that the life of a beach-combing anthropologist in the South Seas would be the most ideal and restful of them all.

When McCann arrived in New Guinea, he built himself a crude shack in the native village of Tambu, and soon won the trust and confidence of the natives. He went barefoot and got hook-worm periodically.

He dressed in the minimum amount of clothing and preferred the company of the natives to that of the Colony officials. When he was actually admitted to the secret society of men in the Haus Tambarin, he was criticized severely. But he countered with the theory that a true anthropologist must live with the people he is studying to thoroughly understand their habits and customs.

Later on McCann was retained by the government in an unofficial capacity of special investigator to Jason French. As a result he became involved in his present work of crime detection, much to his disgust and loss of sleep.

He naturally felt duty-bound to give value received for his salary which he never used. But he also had a maddening desire to sleep twenty-four hours a day with intermittent interruptions in which he ambled down to Marienberg and ate sweet and sour spareribs at Shanghai Nell's pub where ladies had a special entrance on a side street.

Nell returned with the spareribs, and set them on the table. "Have you figured out the double triangle?" she smiled.

"I never tax my mind with problems which some one else can solve for me," he grinned. "Tell me about it."

"Do you want me to feed you also?"

"Just give me the facts, and I'll put them together."

Nell slid into the seat opposite him. "There is another woman involved," she began.

"Besides Kim's daughter?"

"Yes, Simpson's wife."

McCann scowled. "Simpson's wife?" he asked curiously.

"Mrs. Simpson came into the

restaurant a few days ago. Simpson and Kim's daughter were here in this booth. Mrs. Simpson saw them and left immediately. She never was here before. But when I saw the look on her face when she saw her husband with Kim's daughter, I knew something was up. If I were you, Archie dear, I'd start by investigating Mrs. Simpson."

McCann grinned. "Nellie, my sweet, you are magnificent," he said, patting her hand.

"Of course I am" she smiled. "Without me you would be just a worthless beachcomber."

"Without you, life would have no meaning," he bantered. "But now that you've started talking, you've got me thinking about this double triangle."

"Why don't you eat your spareribs?"

"Who are the others in the double triangle?"

"The women are Mrs. Simpson, and Kim's daughter. The men are Mason, Kim, Simpson and a young fellow named Tamo."

"Now wait a minute, Nell," protested McCann. "Tamo wasn't anywhere near Mason's place when the murder was committed."

"Wasn't he?" said Nell.

McCann scowled thoughtfully. "French didn't mention Tamo," he said slowly, and then he peered intently into Nell's eyes. "Well—?"

"If I were you, I'd find out where Tamo was at the time of the murder," said Nell.

"You think—"

"I have no ideas," interrupted Nell; her face was expressionless. "I merely suggested that you find out where Tamo was."

"Are you trying to hide something from me?" said McCann.

Nell smiled, and patted McCann's cheek. "You know very well, my blue-eyed baby, that I wouldn't hide a thing from you. I'm only giving you ideas. It's up to you to develop them."

"But there was no chance for Tamo to do it."

"I didn't say that he did the actual shooting," smiled Nell. "I think he will be able to fit into the motive jigsaw picture."

"But—"

"Have you been out to the Mason residence?"

"French and his men have been over the place from top to bottom."

"Are you going to accept their findings?"

"Well—"

"Why don't you have a talk with Tamo?" she asked.

McCann considered her suggestion for a moment and then began to eat rapidly. "Maybe I will," he said, with his mouth full of rice, and sweet and sour pork. "Might be a good idea."

After finishing his meal, McCann ambled leisurely down to the police station, and draped

himself over an armchair at the side of French's desk.

"Listen, Jason, I'd like to take a look-see at the Mason house," he said, "but I'd like to look at it when Mason isn't home."

"That's easy," smiled French. "Mason and his wife are staying temporarily at the Prince Edward Hotel. Here are the keys."

"Servants gone too?"

"Yes. We're keeping the house locked until we get a confession from Kim."

"What makes you think you'll get a confession from Kim?" asked McCann, stretching himself lazily.

"He's the only one who could have done it."

"He could have been shot—well, from a window."

"No chance. All the windows in the library are sealed and there's air conditioning in the house. We examined everything."

"Did you find any traces of powder on Kim's hands?"

"Of course not. He wore gloves."

"Where are the gloves?"

"That's what we're trying to find out."

"Want to bet Kim didn't do it?" said McCann.

"Don't be asinine!" snapped French. "No one else *could* have killed Simpson. Say, just what are you trying to dream up now?"

McCann hunched his shoulders, and undraped himself from the chair. He picked up the keys to Mason's house and put them in his pocket. "Well, Jason, I'll be seeing you," he said with a grin, and ambled out of the room . . .

McCann let himself into the Mason house, and went immediately to the library. He glanced around the room. It was paneled in teakwood and bookshelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling. The windows had been nailed shut and couldn't be opened. The only entrance was the door into the hall.

He examined the windows carefully and decided that the shot had not come from the outside. He stepped into the doorway, and then moved silently out into the hall. A person in the hall could have shot Simpson easily enough, but McCann remembered that the houseboy had been in the hall and that two servants stood ready to testify they had seen him.

McCann heard a movement in one of the rooms at the far end of the hall. He moved quickly along the hall and listened outside the door through which the sounds were coming. He scowled, and abruptly opened the door to find the houseboy packing a suitcase.

"What are you doing here?" demanded McCann.

"Why, Massa McCann, I just pack my clothes. I go now!"

McCann scowled. "You know me?" he said.

"Sure me know Massa McCann. My papa him Lau Tengi."

"Oh," g r u n t e d McCann. "Maybe you can answer a few questions then. Your papa good man."

"Yass, Massa McCann."

"Where's Mason's bathroom?"

"Me show . . . you come."

"How long you work here?"

"Tree four year, mebbe six," grinned the boy.

"Good!" said McCann, and motioned for the boy to lead the way to the bathroom.

The houseboy took McCann upstairs and showed him an apartment-like suite of rooms. "Massa Mason, him live here all time," said the boy. "Him bathroom," and pointed at the enclosed shower.

McCann inspected the bathroom which had a glass-enclosed shower over the tub. "And you told the police that Mason was in here taking a shower at the time of the shot in the library?" he asked.

"Him taking shower. Him no hear me pound, pound, pound on door for long time. Him singing, and water make plenty too much noise all time."

"How many rooms in this suite?" asked McCann.

"Tree, Massa."

"Hm-m," mused McCann, "looks like a living room, bedroom and bath."

The living room was furnished in unpretentious fashion and a radio-phonograph combination with a record library occupied the entire side of one wall.

McCann glanced over the titles. "Looks like Mason had a taste for music," he observed.

"Massa Mason all time play, play, play," said the boy.

"How long did you say you have worked for him?"

"Tree, four, mebbe six year," repeated the boy.

"Oh, yes, I forgot," grinned McCann. "How long has Mason lived at this place?"

"Fourteen, fifteen, m e b b e twenty years now."

"Isn't this the old Captain Smithers' place?"

"Me no know."

McCann glanced around the room. "Smithers certainly favored teakwood," he said aloud. "The whole house is paneled in teak.

McCann noticed that one of the panels near the record library had several faint horizontal scratches. He glanced at the boy. "You go now," he said.

McCann watched the boy descend the stairs and when he disappeared behind the stairway, McCann returned to the panel and inspected it carefully. It was evident that the panel was movable. He tapped on it lightly. It sounded hollow. He examined it more closely. It was much

thicker and heavier than the other panels next to it.

There were three carved rosettes on each perpendicular strip, edging the panels of the room. One of the rosettes at the top of the strip on the left of the panel appeared to be loose. He reached up and found that it was fastened to the strip with a round wooden peg which extended through the strip and into the panel. He tried the other two rosettes and found that they were also removable.

The panel opened readily when he removed the lower rosette. He peered into the opening. It was about two feet wide, and a steep flight of stairs led downward.

McCann moved quickly across the room and locked the outer door of the suite. He then returned to the panel opening and with the aid of matches descended the stairs. When he arrived at the bottom he found himself in a narrow space which had apparently been used for storing contraband merchandise by Smithers, for several old fiber containers in which opium had been transported were stacked at one end of the narrow alleyway.

He noticed that there were many footprints in the old dust on the floor—of quite recent origin. He wondered why anybody should have had occasion to go to the storeroom. He examined the walls for an exit, but there was no evidence that one existed.

It suddenly dawned on him that one of the walls was that of the library. He recognized the square paneling pattern of the library. He made a torch from some of the fibers of the opium containers and conducted a minute inspection of the footprints in the dust.

There was one place where they pointed directly toward the wall. He followed the panels upward. The middle panel, which was about five and a half feet from the floor, had a two-inch square piece of board attached to its exact center. No other panel was so constructed.

There was evidence that it had been recently moved, for the dust showed fingerprints. McCann grasped it and found that it was a neatly fitted plug which came out without difficulty. He squinted through the hole, and grunted in surprise. He was looking directly into the library and the place where Simpson had been shot was directly in line with the hole.

He examined the end of the plug and saw that it was the carved center of one of the rosettes which embellished each panel of the library. He examined the hole again. It was large enough to enable a killer to sight his victim and shoot him through it.

McCann replaced the plug

and returned to the suite where he closed the panel and refitted the rosettes. He went down to the houseboy's room but the boy had gone. He then went into the library and found the rosette with the removable center. It was one of the neatest bits of precision fitting he had ever seen. Only the closest inspection revealed the threadline closure.

The sound of a truck coming up the driveway rudely interrupted McCann's thoughts. He glanced out of the window, and saw the local garbage truck stopping at the rear entrance. The garbage collector began pounding on the rear door, and McCann went to let him in.

"Where's everybody?" asked the collector. "I was here twice today, but nobody's been at home."

"They are away for a few days," said McCann.

"I'll get the garbage," said the man and pointed toward a covered garbage pail under a screened cover.

McCann opened the porch screendoor, and the collector came in. He removed the screen covering, and opened the pail. "Huh," he grunted, "no garbage —just an old v-belt. Well, thanks, mister. I won't bother with that."

McCann locked the door after him, and then started back into the house. He glanced down into the garbage can as he passed. With a look of surprise he turned quickly, reached down, and removed the v-belt.

A wad of paper came out with the belt, and fell on the floor. He was about to replace the wad in the pail when he noticed that there were several strands of black hair hanging out of it. He opened the paper and there was an entwined mass of the black hairs in the center of the crumpled wad.

He examined the hairs closely. After a moment he frowned thoughtfully. They were cuttings from a phonograph recorder. He tossed them back into the pail together with the v-belt and scratched his nose. He wondered what a v-belt was doing in Mason's garbage can . . .

McCann wound himself into the cramped front seat of his Austin and started back to Marienberg. He suddenly remembered Nell's suggestion that he talk to Tamo. What had Tamo to do with Simpson's murder? Where did Tamo fit into the picture? Tamo was an electrician who had a small shop in Marienberg and did odd jobs around town.

Tamo couldn't be connected with Simpson and his friends. Tamo wasn't the type of person who would fit into the picture. He was married and had five or six children, and an excellent reputation. Nell certainly was

having a pipe dream! Or, *was* she?

Nell was a remarkable woman. Nell knew a lot of things that never became common gossip, but how she knew them, McCann had never been able to find out. He didn't dare ignore any of her suggestions. She had been uncannily right every time before. He decided to call on Tamo.

He went to Tamo's shop and found the youth just ready to leave. "I'd like to talk to you a minute, Tamo," he said.

"Yas, sir, Massa McCann," smiled Tamo.

"Tamo," began McCann, "do you know Mr. Mason?"

"Oh, yas, sir! I just fixed his electric pump yesterday."

"You what?" exclaimed McCann in surprise.

"His pump stopped working and I put a new belt on it."

"A v-belt?" asked McCann quickly.

"Yas, sir. The butler called yesterday noon and told me that the pump wasn't working, and I went up and fixed it."

McCann scratched his nose thoughtfully and squinted down at Tamo's smiling face. "What time were you at the Mason house?" he asked quietly. "Can you remember the exact time?"

"I go see," said Tamo. He went into his shop and returned after a moment with a small note book. "I keep time of each job. I charge by time spent on each job. Here it is . . . I arrive five-o-five P.M. I take off old belt, put on new belt. I leave five-sixteen . . . Mileage five shilling, services one pound."

"Two pounds," said McCann. "Why five shillings?"

"A shilling a mile," grinned Tamo.

"Did you hear about Mr. Simpson being murdered?"

Tamo's mouth dropped open. "Murdered?" he gasped.

"Someone shot Simpson at Mason's house yesterday afternoon," said McCann. "I thought you might know something about it."

"Me?" asked Tamo incredulously. "I was only in basement. Butler not say anything."

McCann hitched his trousers up over his narrow hips. "You are sure you left at five-sixteen?" he asked.

"Yas, sir! I came right back here."

"And the pump was working when you left?"

"Yas, sir. I turned on a faucet and waited for the water to start running."

"It wasn't running before?"

"No, sir, Massa McCann—that's why I went and fixed the pump."

"Did you talk to the butler before you left?"

"He paid me my two pounds."

"Do you know Mr. Simpson very well?"

"I do his work too."

"Did you see Mr. Simpson when you were at the Mason house?"

"No, sir. Only the butler and one of the maids."

"Hump," grunted McCann. Nell must be mistaken, he decided. Tamo certainly showed no evidence of being involved. "Well, I guess that's all," he said. "I'll be seeing you."

McCann went to French's office and asked to see the report on the Simpson murder. He glanced through it carefully. The murder had taken place sometime between five o'clock, and five-fifteen. He frowned and scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"Did you trace the ownership of the gun?" he asked French.

"It was unregistered," said French. "We've made a survey of all the gun shops and no one recognizes it."

"Got anything out of Kim?" asked McCann.

"We're going to use the lie detector as soon as it comes from Port Moresby," said French. "We'll get him then."

"Kim didn't kill Simpson," said McCann quietly.

"If Kim didn't, who did?" snapped French.

"I don't know yet, but I think I've got an idea who did," said McCann with a tired smile. "Better pick up the houseboy for safe keeping before something happens to him."

"No one's leaving town until this thing is settled!" French assured him.

"I said you'd better pick up the houseboy," repeated McCann with a yawn. "We're going to need him."

"Why?" demanded French.

"I want you to bring the houseboy, Mason and his wife, Simpson's wife, Kim and his daughter and Tamo to Mason's house tonight."

"Tamo?" questioned French in surprise.

"Yes, Tamo. Have them all at Mason's house tonight at eight."

"Tamo, the electrician?"

"That's right. But don't scare the pants off him when you get him. We'll need his testimony also."

"Say—what's all this about?" demanded French irritatedly.

McCann went immediately to Nell's living quarters in the restaurant building. "What gave you the idea that Tamo knew something about Simpson's death?" he asked.

Nell regarded him steadily. "Didn't he?" she asked and continued lacquering her nails.

"Come on, Nell—give!"

"Tamo was here yesterday afternoon," said Nell. "He fixed a light switch for me. He was late and I chided him for being late. He said that he had an

emergency call out to Mason's house and from the way I figure it he must have been there at the time of the murder."

McCann slid into a chair beside her. "Go on," he urged.

"That's all there is," she smiled. She held up her hand and inspected the red lacquer on her nails.

"What did you mean when you said a double triangle?" asked McCann curiously.

"Got a pencil?" asked Nell.

"No."

"There's one on the table," said Nell and indicated a table-desk at the side of the room. "Get a pencil and a piece of paper."

McCann got the pencil and paper. "Now what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Draw two triangles—side by side with a common apex," she directed.

"All right—there they are."

"Now put Kim's daughter at the common apex; Mason at the lower left; Simpson at the lower right and Mrs. Simpson at the common lower angles between them."

"Isn't Kim in on this?"

"He doesn't appear to be, does he?" asked Nell, holding up her other hand and inspecting the lacquer. "But you have a double triangle."

"It doesn't make sense."

Nell re-capped the lacquer bottle. "Did you notice my new waitress?" she asked.

"Which one?"

"The pretty one with red hair."

"I didn't know she was a new one . . . Why?"

"She used to work for the Simpsons," said Nell and held her hands out for McCann's inspection. "Like the new shade?"

"Hm—m—m," grinned McCann. "Clever woman!"

"I think I have the motive," said Nell. "Simpson wanted Mason's stock in the Copra Trading Company. Mason had been juggling company funds and was short about fifty thousand dollars."

"Are you s u r e t h i s is straight?" interrupted McCann.

"My waitress overheard Mason and Simpson having an argument over the shortage and the stock. Now if you will stop interrupting, I'll put her gossip into logical sequence!"

"Sorry, Nell," smiled McCann. "Shoot!"

"Simpson demanded Mason's stock and threatened to expose him at the stockholder's meeting and ruin him if he didn't turn it over. Mason knew that Simpson was having extra-marital relations with Kim's daughter and threatened to tell Simpson's wife, which naturally would result in Simpson's loss of control of the company. Mason called Mrs. Simpson one evening, and

told her that if she came here she would find her husband with Kim's daughter—I told you about that. Simpson and his wife had a knock-down and drag-out fight when he got home. Now you take over."

"Thanks, Nell," said McCann. "I'll be seeing you."

* * *

After all of the people involved in the Simpson murder were assembled in the Mason library, McCann told Commissioner French to watch the eyes of every one in the room while he was questioning each suspect.

McCann motioned toward Tamo. "You told me this afternoon that you repaired the electric pump in the basement?" he asked for confirmation.

"Yas, sir."

"What time did you get the pump running again?"

"About ten minutes past five."

"And there was no water in the pipes until that time?"

"Yas, sir."

McCann turned to the butler. "Were you here at the time Tamo repaired the pump?" he asked.

"I was."

"And what he has said is correct?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't know when the water started."

McCann reached into his pocket and brought out the shavings from the phonograph-recorder. He walked over to where Mason was standing and showed them to Mason. "What are these, Mr. Mason?" he asked.

Mason touched them with his fingers. "They look like threads from a record-making machine," he said, looking defiantly into McCann's eyes.

"That's what they are," confirmed McCann. "Do you know where I found them?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Mason quickly. "Where did you find them?"

"In your garbage pail," said McCann.

"Could be," admitted Mason easily. "I do a lot of recording."

"Did you ever make a recording of a person singing in a shower?" asked McCann.

McCann saw Mason's eyes narrow. "I never thought of that," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders.

McCann turned and walked past French. "Watch Mason's eyes," he whispered, and then he faced Mason again. "Kim didn't shoot Simpson," he said abruptly. "He was shot by a person who was outside this room. He was shot through a small hole in one of the panels."

Mason's eyes darted involuntarily toward the rosette in the center panel. McCann had removed the plug, and the hole could be plainly seen. Mason's eyes widened with fear as they remained fixed on the hole. Mc-

Cann motioned for French to get behind Mason.

"We must next establish a motive," continued McCann. "The murderer was facing disgrace and financial ruin because he had stolen fifty thousand dollars of the Copra Trading Company's funds. Simpson was threatening to expose him unless he turned over all his stock to him. He planned everything carefully—even to a motive for Simpson's death.

"He told Kim about Simpson and Kim's daughter, and he also told Mrs. Simpson so that she would be a confirming witness. Then he made a recording of himself singing in the shower. Oh, he was clever, all right.

"But the one thing he didn't count on was the fact that there was no water for the shower at the time he was playing the recording, and while he was creeping down the wall through a secret panel from his private suite to the hole through which he shot Simpson. However, when he rushed back to his suite, the water had been turned on. He quickly turned on the shower, got himself wet and mussed up his hair. Then he put on a bathrobe and answered the houseboy's frantic pounding on the door!"

Mason's hand flashed into his coat, but before he had a chance to get his gun, McCann's long arm darted out and his fist smashed into Mason's chin. French caught him as he staggered back and pinned his arms behind him.

McCann grinned and hitched his baggy pants up over his slim hips. "There you are, Jason," he said. "He's your murderer."

McCann's face sobered as he glared at Mason. "Where you made your mistake, old man," he said quietly, "was in trying to pin a murder rap on my friend Kau Kim. I don't like people who do things like that!"

McCann glanced at French and his grin returned. "Well, Jason, I hope you are able to take over from here on, because I'm going home and get caught up on my lost sleeep—er, that is, after I go down and give Nell her usual remuneration for helping me solve the problems you can't solve. Good day, Jason. I'll be seein' you!"

jim hanvey intervenes

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

A sleuth as huge and ungainly as Jim Hanvey just had to be clever —to walk a tightrope to Justice.

IT WAS perhaps the most modest structure on a street of unpretentious houses in an unpretentious neighborhood — a gray shingle, two-story dwelling. It stood back of a tiny lawn which had been mowed to a velvety smoothness. There was a brass knocker on the front door, and shafts of soft yellow light streamed from its downstairs windows, giving it a gracious air.

A small suburban bus stopped impertinently at the corner and a huge figure of a man descended. For a moment the stranger stood staring about him uncertainly, his tremendous bulk silhouetted against the glare of the street light. Then he accosted a couple of small boys who were headed toward the nearby movie theatre.

"You kids know where Ed Burman lives?" he asked.

"Yeah, we know." The smaller of the two stared in incredulous amazement at the gigantic bulk of human flesh facing him. "It's the fourth house on the right."

"Thanks, son," said the stranger, and waddled slowly into the

The creator of the renowned Jim Hanvey, the sleuth who never sleeps despite his outward massiveness and general air of somnolence here sparks with a mastery unsurpassed a wonderful saga of small-town crime and violence. And in so doing challenges the manifold excellencies of Nero Wolfe and Mike Hammer with a touch of homespun deductive magic you're certain to relish.

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shadows. The boys crossed the street, then turned and stared after him.

Jim Hanvey chuckled. His size appeared to afford so much amusement to the world in general. There was, as Jim himself admitted, a great deal of it. He had long since lost any vestige of figure. He had an amazing waistline, an enormous neck, a huge leonine head, and legs which seemed always on the verge of refusing to support him.

His movements were slow and deliberate, and even in the broadest daylight he seemed more than half asleep. That misleading impression was perhaps due to his eyes. Fishlike orbs, they were, perpetually half-curtained by lazy lids.

Jim Hanvey, sighed as he turned in at the Burman home. It was such a nice place, and the glimpse he caught through the window was one of serenity. Ed and Dot! Good heavens! What a difference between this little seventy-dollar-a-month cottage and the suite at the Ritz Hotel where they had formerly resided.

Jim shook his enormous head as he crossed the veranda and rattled the brass knocker. "I'm a sentimental fool," he said to himself. "But in sober truth I'd rather be shot than go through with this."

Ed Burman answered his knock. He was just as tall as Jim remembered him, and his quiet blue eyes retained their hint of steel. His jaw, too, was just as firm, and the corners of his eyes still held their interesting crinkles. But Ed Burman himself, the man Hanvey thought he knew, had changed profoundly.

Hanvey remembered him as one of the cleverest gentleman crooks in the country—a soft spoken, suave, handsome young man who sought his victims on country club levels. He had always prided himself on his expensive and immaculate wardrobe. Now he was dressed in old trousers, shoes which had been half-soled, a gray flannel shirt open at the throat and a heavy black sweater that was conspicuously frayed.

But he was better looking than Jim Hanvey had ever known him to be, and so thoroughly at home in this quiet, peaceful suburban atmosphere that he winced again at thought of the task which confronted him.

Ed stared through the screen door, endeavoring to identify his visitor. Then, as his eye took in the outline of the mammoth human being standing there in the gloom of late evening, he flung the door back and grabbed Hanvey's two fat arms in riotous welcome.

"Jim Hanvey! I couldn't believe my eyes for a minute. Come on in, feller." He called back into the house, "Hey, Dot! Look who's here."

The door connecting the dining-room and kitchen opened and Mrs. Ed Burman appeared. Jim grinned and blinked. She too had changed. But though her lovely blondness was made less glamorous by the apron, and the tiny tendrils of her rich golden hair nestled damply against her forehead, she still seemed somehow the Dot of ermine and mink and emeralds whom he could still so vividly recapture in retrospect and was never likely to forget.

She, too, seemed delighted to see him. Her eyes widened, and she sped into the front hall to shake his hand warmly.

"You haven't changed at all, Jim," she said. "You're still twice as large as life, and just as unnatural!"

Hanvey chuckled. "Always quick with compliments, aren't you, Dot?"

"And a great deal quicker with dinner. It's going on the table right now." She turned to her husband, "Put our extra-special guest chair at the head of the table, Ed."

Ed Burman placed the chair at the tiny dining table. But Jim hung back. He stared uncertainly about the two rooms disclosed to his view—the simple, inexpensively furnished living-room and dining-room. Installment-plan stuff, and of the most modest grade.

They were dragging him toward the table, both talking at once, obviously delighted to see him. They suspected nothing.

"I'm not hungry, Ed," he protested. "Honestly, I'm not."

"You never saw the day you weren't hungry, Jim Hanvey." The girl crossed to the kitchen. "Sit on him, Ed," she called through the open door. "Keep him pinned down while I open another can of beans."

Jim was ill at ease. He cleared his throat and his fat fingers fiddled with the heavy links of his old-fashioned watch chain. He stared somberly into the kitchen, and then, uneasily, at his host.

"I came for something else, Ed."

"Never mind, Jim." Burman's delight in his friend's presence was quieter than Dot's, but no less genuine. "We can talk better after we finish dining."

Jim argued, but they refused to listen to him. Within ten minutes they had him seated at the table before a simple repast. Dot never stopped talking as she plied him with the ample but inexpensive food. She asked a million questions, and didn't wait for his answer, and Jim, munching uneasily, despised himself more and more.

Through his half-closed, sleepy eyes, Jim saw Ed's gaze turn affectionately toward the slim, blonde woman who sat opposite him.

"Jim, you don't know what

you've missed by remaining a bachelor," said Ed.

Dot flushed and looked down at her plate. Jim saw, without appearing to see that Dot was indeed a competent homemaker. But somehow he couldn't help thinking of the luxurious way of life she had been accustomed to for so long.

"What are you working at now, Ed?" he asked, abruptly.

"I'm shop foreman at a downtown garage." Ed chuckled. "It's quite a comedown, Jim. But it was the only work I knew."

"Much money in it?" Hanvey asked, his tone casual.

"Sixty a week," Jim replied. "But we manage to scrape along, don't we, Dot?"

She nodded quickly—a little too quickly, Hanvey thought. "After a fashion," she said. "I do all my own work except the heavy cleaning and the washing." She turned her pretty face to Jim. "There doesn't seem much of a future in it, does there?"

Jim frowned. "There might be—I never had enough genius to repair a typewriter."

Their talk drifted to reminiscences of the old days. Ed talked frankly of his recklessly eventful past—recalling it to memory with a curious mixture of pride and regret. It was something to have preserved a certain integrity through it all—something, for instance, to have earned the respect and friendship of so redoubtable a sleuth as Jim Hanvey.

They chatted of this affair and that, and Dot Burman, sitting tensely forward on her chair, drank in every word, her eyes shining, her slender young body taut.

After dinner Dot cleared the table and then joined Jim and her husband in the living-room. Burman was puffing contentedly at his pipe and Jim was inhaling the fumes of a strong black cigar. He seemed strangely quiet and ill at ease, and even when Dot joined them Jim had little to say.

He lay back in the easy-chair, his hands crossed over his prodigious stomach and his opaque eyes blinking sleepily. Yet it was Jim Hanvey, and not his hosts who brought the subject around to the real reason for his visit.

"I shouldn't have accepted your hospitality, Ed," he said.

"Why not?" Ed straightened in his chair and eyed his friend uneasily.

Dot gave a gay little laugh. "Is my cooking so bad?"

"It's not that, Dot. It concerns my reason for being here." Jim's hands clenched tightly. "I'm on the most unpleasant kind of mission."

His tone sobered them.

"What is it?" asked Ed Burman quietly.

"Don't you know, Ed?"

"Certainly not." The peaceful

expression had fled from Burman's face. It had become once again the inscrutable gray mask of the more hectic days. A warning sounded within him, a warning to be on guard. He asked no questions. He merely regarded his friend steadily and waited.

Jim fidgeted. "I told you I had no right to sit at your table and pretend I'd just dropped in on a friendly visit. "I'm sorry—"

Dot leaned forward tensely. "What is it, Jim?"

"I hate to tell you. Dot, I'm—I'm down here to take Ed in!"

There was a moment of horrified silence. Dot's eyes flew open. Ed Burman sat very still, and the muscles stood out prominently on the sides of his jaw.

"You don't mean that, Jim. You can't mean it!"

"I'm afraid I do, Ed. Frankly, I never had a job in my life that I hated worse. I feel like a skunk, but I've no alternative."

Dot's cheeks flamed. "Don't be a fool, Jim Hanvey! You know Ed has gone straight ever since we moved here."

"Do I?"

"Can't you see? Do you suppose he'd be working in a garage for sixty dollars a week if he was mixed up in anything crooked?"

"He might be using that job as a cover, Dot. It has been done before."

Burman was stony-faced, but his voice came with the crispness of snapping icicles: "What are you arresting me for, Jim?"

Hanvey's eyes closed slowly, then opened again with exasperating deliberateness. "If you'd give me the MacArthur bonds, Ed, I might not have to take you in."

Burman stared at him incredulously for a moment, then gave a harsh, bitter laugh. "The MacArthur bonds? You think *I* stole them?"

"Uh-huh."

Dot was on her feet, her lips ashen. "Oh, Jim! What a fool you are! You know that Ed never—"

"Just a minute, honey," Burman interposed, moving quickly to her side. "Let's not lose our heads. Jim's wrong, and I'll try to make him see it."

"I hope so, Ed," said Hanvey fervently. "God knows I do."

Burman faced him squarely. "There isn't anything I can say, Jim—that is, by way of proof. I've gone straight ever since I married Dot. We gave up a lot of money and luxury—for this. We've no regrets, but I won't pretend it wasn't tough going at times, especially for Dot. My boss will tell you that I've stayed on the job, and worked hard, day in and day out, for sixty dollars a week."

Jim lighted a fresh cigar. He fidgeted nervously. "You mentioned your salary before, Ed—and I'm afraid I know what it

means. You've put up a struggle, Ed. But you've lost. It doesn't make me any the less fond of you. I know what you've been through. Turn in the bonds, Ed—and I'll forget the whole thing. I give you my word."

"I haven't the bonds," Burman said, looking the other straight in the eye.

"There's not much sense in denying it, Ed."

"I'm not lying!" said Burman harshly. "Get this, Jim Hanvey. I've known you for a good many years. You usually wait until it's almost too late before you make a pinch. I've never before known you to arrest an innocent man. There isn't any railroading in your system."

"There isn't now."

"How can you expect me to believe that when you're arresting me for something I didn't do. Can't you see what it means, Jim? The charge will ruin me. I'll be cleared, but I'll be out of a job just the same. I wouldn't mind it so much if some iron-domed flatfoot pulled it. But you, Jim Hanvey, whom I've always looked upon as a friend. I never thought it would come to this."

"Ed, do you think I like what I have to do?"

Dot, who had been pacing the room, whirled on Hanvey. "I thought I knew you, Jim. I always gave you credit for being a square-shooter. But you're not. You've got Ed with his hands tied, and you're not giving him a chance."

"I could just possibly be wrong, Dot."

"Wrong! You poor fool! You were never more wrong in your life. Can't you see what you're doing? You're going to make a thief of him again. He'll lose his job. Innocent or guilty, it makes no difference. Then he'll hit the skids again. Not that I'd be so sorry. I guess this honesty game isn't all that it's cracked up to be, when any blind, bungling cop can step in and crush a man's efforts to be decent."

Jim mopped his forehead with a large handkerchief. "It *is* rotten Ed—my eating your dinner and then taking you down with me. But I've got it to do."

Burman spoke gently, "I guess I understand, Jim. I've got a hunch you really *do* like me pretty well. So—I guess it's only your judgment that is warped." He rose and faced Hanvey. "I'm ready, Jim. You wouldn't have carried things this far if you hadn't been convinced of my guilt in your own mind."

Jim looked at him gratefully. "Thanks, Ed," he said. "I was hoping you'd see it that way."

Dot planted herself in the path of the big man. She was a slim, militant figure, and her eyes were blazing. "I'd like to tell you exactly what I think of you. I'd like—"

"Easy, Dot." Ed's voice was

infinitely gentle. "I've known Jim Hanvey for a long time, and I know he's on the level."

"On the level! Ed, can't you know what he's doing to you? He's railroading you up the river. Can't you see it?"

Ed shook his head. "No, Dot. Jim really believes I stole those bonds. I'm only sorry that he doesn't trust me enough to give me a chance." He turned to Jim, dignified, yet pleading: "I tell you I *didn't* steal those bonds. I don't know anything about them except what I read in the papers. It isn't going to hurt anybody to give me a little time."

Hanvey's lips tightened. "Sorry, Ed. I simply can't do it."

"You see!" exclaimed Dot bitterly. "All he's thinking about is making an arrest."

Ed Burman's eyes had narrowed. There was more than a hint of acid in his voice as he turned to Hanvey. "I've never known you to be pigheaded, either, Jim," he said. "But if you're set on making a showing—"

Hanvey winced. "I know it's tough, Ed."

They took their hats and started for the door. There Ed took his wife in his arms and begged her not to worry. "I'll come clear, kid. Don't you fret."

She tore herself away and faced Hanvey. "I suppose you'll slip bracelets on him, won't you? You can rattle them every once in a while so everybody will know what a slick, efficient cop you are!"

Hanvey flushed, but he did not answer. And then the two men walked into the night.

They reached headquarters, and Hanvey talked briefly with the desk sergeant. At Jim's request a special cell was assigned to Burman, and it was further arranged that no one was to be allowed to see him. The eyes of the detective showed suffering as he watched Burman march away, straight and tall and proud in his innocence.

Once the cell door had closed behind his prisoner much of Jim's lethargy fell away. He turned back to the sergeant.

"Who's on this job with me?" he asked.

"Raftery and Walcott," the latter replied promptly.

"Good. Have you got a police car ready?"

The sergeant nodded. "Outside," he said. "Smith driving."

"Kayo!" Jim waved a fleshy paw and waddled into the paved courtyard of police headquarters.

A quiet voice hailed him, and he climbed into a cruise car beside an alert young man. Jim spoke briefly, giving the address of Ed Burman's house. Smith let in his gears, stepped on the gas, and they whirled into the street.

They made the journey in about fifteen minutes and turned into the pleasant, tree-lined street

on which the Burman house was located.

Hanvey directed Smith to stop the car near the corner, where he slowly and awkwardly alighted. He had passed the corner and was moving toward the Burman residence, when a figure detached itself from the shadows and accosted him.

"Chief!" the newcomer whispered.

Jim peered through the gloom. "Who's that?" he demanded.

"Walcott," said the other, stepping forward into the light.

"Where's Raftery?" Jim demanded.

"He followed Mrs. Burman," Walcott replied. "He made sure she didn't see him."

"How long ago?" Jim asked. "Can you tell me exactly?"

"She left the house about twenty minutes after you did."

"How'd she go?"

"She took a taxi and Raftery followed. He had his car parked around the corner."

"Have you heard from him since?"

Walcott nodded again. "Just 'bout fifteen minutes ago. We had arranged for him to phone me at the corner drugstore. He says we're to come to Eight-ninety-one Sycamore Avenue, Miramar Apartments. He's there now."

"Good work, Walcott. I'll get Smith to run me over. You stick around here. Keep an eye on Burman's house until you're called off."

Walcott saluted and Jim walked back to the police car. He climbed in beside Smith and gave the address of the Miramar Apartments, and as they rolled off under the trees the huge detective stared unseeingly into the shadows.

The Miramar! He knew it well enough. It was a new apartment house peopled with wealthy tenants. He thought it over, and nodded. He was almost sure now that he was on the trail of something important. If he wasn't . . .

Jim sighed. He couldn't forget the stricken look in the eyes of his friend, Ed Burman. Police business could be plenty tough at times.

Eventually they emerged into a section of stately homes and recently erected apartment houses. Smith turned into Sycamore Avenue and stopped his car a few doors from the newest and most imposing apartment building on the block.

Jim stepped out, ordered Smith to wait, and then walked slowly toward the Miramar.

The square-shouldered, heavy-set figure of Raftery approached. He jerked his thumb toward the brilliantly illuminated building.

"She's in there, Chief."

"What apartment?"

"Carson's, I'm pretty sure. I didn't want to ask before you got

here. I was afraid the doorman might tip 'em off."

"Nice work, Mike," Hanvey said. "You stick around out here."

"Are you sure you don't want me to come up with you?" Raftery asked.

Hanvey shook his head. "No, I won't need you. You can watch the lobby, though. If Dot Burman or Carson come down without me—stop 'em."

"I'll do that," Raftery promised.

Hanvey walked heavily into the lobby. It was a glittery affair, distinctly too ornate. The elevator man looked up in friendly fashion.

"I've an appointment with Mr. Otis Carson," said Jim. "Never mind announcing me. Just take me up."

The operator opened his lips to protest, and found himself gazing at a police badge. He blinked.

"All right, sir. It's Apartment Fourteen-B."

"I'd advise you to forget this whole thing," Jim said. "It's not worth remembering."

"Yes, sir."

They alighted on the fourteenth floor. Jim got out and watched the elevator disappear. He waited a moment, then pressed the buzzer of Fourteen-B. His large forehead was beaded with perspiration and he was obviously not happy.

The door of the apartment opened slowly, and Jim found himself gazing into the steely gray eyes of a man taller than himself—a man who seemed not at all pleased to see him.

"Hello, Ote," Jim said.

Carson's eyes narrowed, and he made no move to admit his caller. "Well?" he asked coldly.

"Ote, I'm surprised at you. Aren't you going to ask me in?"

Carson's features hardened. "No. There's not a thing we could talk about."

"That's too bad. Unfortunately, Ote, I've got to come in."

Carson's thin, sensitive lips curled with distaste. "What do you want?"

"Just a serious little chat with you and Dot Burman for a minute or two." Jim was so easy of manner, so self-assured, that Carson was nonplused.

Carson thought swiftly, then stood aside. "All right," he said ungraciously. "Come in."

Jim walked down the hallway, followed by Carson He stepped into a gorgeous living room—a huge affair of many windows, impressive tapestries, and expensively tasteful furniture. A woman, slim and blonde and exquisitely beautiful, sprang to her feet.

Jim smiled cheerfully. "Hello, Dot. How are you?"

Dot Burman's hand went to her breast. She swayed a little, staring at Hanvey with distended eyes. Over his shoulder she could

see the coldly sinister face of Otis Carson, and she was frightened by his expression.

Perhaps something of her terror flashed a message to Hanvey, for he spoke in a whisper, without turning his head.

"I wouldn't do a thing, Ote. Raftery and Smith are downstairs."

"Think I believe that?" came in an envenomed whisper.

"I really don't know, Ote. But, anyway, you're too wise to take a chance."

He seated himself on an overstuffed couch, lighted one of his atrocious cigars, and blew a cloud of rancid smoke into the room.

"Swell place, Ote. You've had good pickings recently, I should imagine."

Carson bit his lower lip. He succeeded in keeping silent, as Hanvey turned his attention to the terrified Dot Burman.

"I can't hardly blame you, Dot," mused Hanvey. "This is the sort of life you were used to before you married Ed. I guess every time you cooked a meal for him or washed a dish, you were thinking of the old days."

She was breathing audibly. Her eyes were fixed on his moonlike face. "What do you mean, Jim?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all, Dot. I was just saying I don't blame you a bit. If Ed was fool enough to stay nuts about you, and go straight for you—then I guess it was all right for you to figure to throw him over."

"Who says I was leaving Ed?"

"We-e-ell, I just sort of thought—"

Carson planted himself squarely in front of the indifferent detective. "What did you come here for?"

"Just to tell you and Dot goodbye."

"Good-bye?"

"Sure. Weren't you planning to go away? Haven't you been crazy about her always, and haven't you been making a play for her ever since Ed Burman went straight? Haven't you been working on her love of luxury and pretty clothes, and didn't you have tickets bought to sail to Europe Saturday?

"You're all right, Ote. Sure, you are. You're slick. You knew Ed never would figure on you double-crossing him. You knew Dot was getting sick of her life with Ed. You knew she had completely lost her love for her husband—"

"That's not true, Jim!" Dot Burman's voice broke in hysterically. "I'm crazy about Ed."

"Yeah? Well—maybe. And then again—maybe not. But, anyway, Dot, you and Ote have got everything fixed fine. Ed's in jail where he can't bother you. I'll see that he gets a ten-year stretch, and—"

"Jim, listen!" Dot Burman

stood before him, slender and beautiful, a pleading earnestness in her eyes. "I'm going to tell you the truth, and I think you know me well enough to know whether I'm lying or not. Will you listen?"

Jim nodded. "Sure, I will. Listening is the best thing I do."

Dot straightened.

"You are right in most of what you say. I *was* getting awfully fed up. It didn't seem to be getting us anywhere. Ote *has* been making a play for me, and I guess I can't blame him. However, I always told him I loved Ed. But I told him, too, that I couldn't stand being poor much longer. He put it up to me squarely: Forget Ed and go with him. Big hotels, travel, money . . . jewelry. Do you see how that got under my skin, Jim?"

"Yes, Dot, I see."

"I was sick of getting up every morning at six to cook breakfast; of slaving all day—of having nothing. I was sure I could break away from Ed. And I'll be honest with you. If you hadn't shown up at our house tonight, I'd have gone through with it. I would have gone off with Ote—and ruined everything."

"What do you mean, Dot, ruined everything?"

"I'd have been sorry inside of a week. And it would have been too late then." She took a step forward. "When you showed up tonight, Jim, and arrested Ed, then I knew what was right and what was wrong.

"It taught me, all of a sudden, that there isn't anything in life that means as much to me as Ed. Yes—and I'm not lying! There isn't anything that means as much to me as keeping him straight. I came here to tell Ote it was all off, that he'd have to take his little cruise by himself. I mean it, Jim. And now—"

Jim's eyelids closed slowly. "I believe you, Dot." He gave a long yawn. "But are you sure you'd be willing to go back to the sixty-a-week routine if Ed was free?"

Her eyes blazed with wild hope. "Oh, Jim! I'm willing to starve with Ed. And then you come along and arrest him for something he didn't do."

"Yeah . . . And even with him in prison, you wouldn't be going off with Ote?"

"No. He understands that."

"Is that true, Ote?"

The man's face was stony, his voice cold. "Dot doesn't lie," he said.

"Well. Then we've pretty near straightened out everything I came for. There's just one little detail missing." He grinned at Carson. "Suppose you hand me the MacArthur bonds, Ote—*all of 'em.*"

Dot looked startled. Carson's eyes were mere slits. For perhaps two interminable minutes he stared at Hanvey. He was an old

hand at the game, and he knew when he was beaten.

"Suppose I do?" he inquired.

"Then I'll turn you loose—under certain conditions."

"What are they?" Ote demanded.

"That you forget there's any such person in the world as Dot Burman. That you get out and stay out. Because if Ed ever finds out how close Dot was to leaving him— Well, all I say is, Ote—God help you!"

Carson nodded. "It's a deal, Jim," he said crisply. He moved an oil painting which hung on the wall opposite Jim, whirled the dial of a tiny safe, and handed Hanvey a package of bonds. "Count them," he said. "They're all there."

Jim made a quick inspection, sighed with satisfaction, and put the bonds in his pocket. "Kayo, Ote," he said. "You've done a very wise thing."

Dot Burman had seated herself. Her cheeks were dead white and her fingers were interlaced tightly. "Jim!" she whispered.

"Yes, Dot?"

"When you came up here tonight . . . you knew . . . everything?"

"Pretty near."

"You knew that Ote was the one who had stolen the bonds?"

Jim nodded. "Sure. I knew that a couple days ago."

"Do you think that I knew it?"

Hanvey shook his head. "No, Dot, I don't."

"I've been thinking . . . Jim, if you knew all the time that Otis had those bonds, why did you arrest Ed?"

Hanvey rubbed the palms of his hands together. "Isn't that kind of obvious, Dot?"

"No."

"Well, it was this way. Ed is my friend, and things were clouding up all around him. I didn't know if you'd go through with this. But if you didn't, I wanted to make sure Ed would never know what you'd been thinking of. Then I figured if you did go off with Ote, Ed would do something violent, and pretty soon be in for life on account of a woman who had never really loved him.

"Any way I looked at it, Dot, it seemed that the only way to keep him out of trouble was to lock him up. As for the MacArthur bonds, we know when Ote got them and how. He's been trailed ever since."

Jim snapped the blade of his golden toothpick, as though to put a period to his remarks. "That's all, Dot, or nearly all."

She had crumpled into a pathetic little heap in the easy-chair. He stood over her and clumsily patted her shoulder.

"Forget it, kid. Play it up. That's all you got to do, and it ought to be easy."

"It will, Jim . . . I was crying —about you!"

"What about me?"

"What you've done, what you've saved me from . . . and what it will mean to Ed. And something else. I know that you've hurt Ed, that he'll most likely never feel the same to you again. And you were awfully fond of him."

"I'll admit it," said Hanvey softly. "And that's why he mustn't ever know what's really happened. You promise, Dot?"

She nodded. "I promise."

"Good. Now beat it home. I'm going down and turn Ed loose."

He waved one pudgy paw and waddled to the door.

An hour later he stood outside the jail with Ed Burman. Jim didn't dare look at his friend.

"This was a rotten mess, Ed. I was just a misguided, blind fool—thinking you'd gone crooked again. There isn't anything I can do but apologize. I'm sorry." His voice was oddly gentle.

The face of the tall, dignified man softened. A faint smile touched the corners of his lips, and he put a friendly hand on Hanvey's shoulder.

"That's all right, Jim. It was a mistake." He hesitated for a moment, and then said: "The only thing that really hurt bad, Jim, was being misunderstood by a friend."

Jim Hanvey's eyes opened slowly and dwelt on Ed Burman's face.

"You're right, Ed," he whispered. "I sure can understand that!"

A superb literary craftsman and master of suspense wrestles with a terrifying crime conundrum by waters darkly flowing

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

by C. S. FORESTER

A shipload of munitions, tiled patios and several macaws vie with three clues and a corpse to chill the famed Captain North in Fabulous Habana

THE PORT OF PERIL

by VAN WYCK MASON

in the next SAINT

no motive for murder

by . . . Craig Rice

It's terrifying to be framed for murder when the classic, the perfect solution won't come to your aid. But Malone wasn't born yesterday.

SOMETHING UNPLEASANT was going to happen, something almost incredibly unpleasant. John J. Malone was sure of it. The conviction had not come to him by instinct, nor by a quick brush with a well-polished crystal ball. But he could tell by the way the owner, manager and headwaiter of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar was gazing at him sympathetically. Indeed, Joe the Angel had just bought him two drinks in rapid succession, and that clinched it.

"If this is just a bad dream," the little lawyer said gloomily, "I wish I could tune in on another channel."

"Malone," Joe the Angel said in a worried voice, "maybe it would be better that you don't go."

Malone shook his head. The impending appointment in his office was one he had to keep, dire predictions or no dire predictions. It might solve a kidnapping. It might prevent a murder. It might settle a lot of things,

---

The kind of mystery story that sends you almost immediately into an emotional tailspin, and makes you wary of the motives of even the most sedate of white-haired grandmothers is unhappily rare in modern crime fiction. Fredric Brown excels at that sort of thing, and so does Charlotte Armstrong. But Craig Rice seems at times inimitably to surpass them both, and while there are no actual grandmothers in this brand new J. J. Malone saga her sure master's touch provides some extraordinary substitutes and supercharged, turnabout thrills.

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most of them political. And it might even make money for John J. Malone.

He looked at his watch. It was still early, but for once in his life he wanted to avoid trouble. Joe the Angel's reaction to his having been picked as the go-between in the Squire affair had unnerved him. He was used to walking into trouble and to knowing that it was going to be there waiting for him. But he did like to have some advance notice of what particular kind it was going to be.

He sighed unhappily, finished his rye, and went out into the night that was heady with warm spring winds which whispered of far more agreeable activities than keeping a business appointment. The mellow light of neon signs made a nice substitute for technicolor moonlight, and the sounds from a phonograph shop's loud-speaker could have been the music of the spheres. But not for Malone—not that night. Moonlight and business appointments wouldn't mix.

It was five past ten, and the appointment was set for ten-thirty. He decided to go to his office and do his worrying in private. For a moment he stood looking from across the street at the somewhat dingy and certainly far from pretentious building that had housed his office since the time when he'd finished night law school and given up driving a taxi, more years ago than he cared to remember.

On a sudden, and completely unreasoning impulse, he went down the alley, unlocked a rear door, and made his way up to his floor on the self-service freight elevator. The hallway was not only dark and deserted, but downright melancholy, almost ominous. He lit a cigar, gave himself a brief but stern talking-to, opened the door and switched on the light. Then for a moment he stood silent, his cigar going out unnoticed.

It had been bound to happen sooner or later, and the amazing thing was that it had never happened before. Malone looked down at the body of Leonard Estapoole, at the carefully planted signs of a mild struggle, and reflected that whoever had framed him for murder had done an excellent job.

But his private guardian angel had done an excellent job too, in getting him here a good fifteen minutes early. Because this was one of the times when he was going to have to act fast, and think about what to do after he had done it.

Leonard Estapoole, financier, solid citizen and sterling character, had appointed himself a one man anti-Malone committee. Now he lay sprawled on the floor of John J. Malone's office, bludgeoned to death with the conventional blunt instrument.

in this case a heavy bronze Buddha from Malone's desk.

Leonard Estapoole had been a tall, skinny, ascetic-looking man with skimpy pale hair, eyes like ice-blue eggs, a long squeamish nose, and a thin, almost lipless mouth that had smiled only at park dedications and corner-stone laying ceremonies. He didn't look any better dead, either.

The immediate problem was what to do with him for the next few hours. The little lawyer looked around the room thoughtfully. Moving the late Leonard Estapoole was going to be a heavy job, but the fire escape seemed to be the best solution. He opened the window and hauled the body through it and down to the next landing. He tucked it carefully in the narrow space between the fire escape and the window-pane so that it wouldn't be noticed by a casual glance from above. Then he climbed back to his office puffing a little and reflecting that it was a damned good thing Leonard Estapoole hadn't been a bigger man.

That done, he set himself to the task of straightening up the office. He righted the two overturned chairs and the wastebasket, picked up the bronze Buddha and put it exactly where it had always been on the desk. It was probably thick with fingerprints, but he wasn't at all concerned about that. His prints would be all over it, and so would those of Maggie, his secretary, any number of casual visitors over a long period of time, and Mrs. Budlicek, the cleaning woman.

Luckily, there was no blood to be washed off. Apparently it had been thrown at the late Leonard Estapoole, done its work and bounced off. The blood, and there wasn't very much of it, was on the floor. Malone blew on the bronze Buddha to dispose of any posible stray pale hairs, wet a handful of paper towels, and scrubbed ineffectually at the spot on the floor.

A few minutes later he flung the sodden towels in the wastebasket and decided that desperate, even heroic measures were needed. The stain was lighter but it looked definitely and unexplainably wet. He opened the file drawer marked *"Emergency,"* lifted out a bottle of gin that was more than half full, took one last, parting gulp, and poured the remainder regretfully on the floor. Then, just in case even fuller explanation was needed, he smashed the bottle, scattered its finer fragments over the stain and its vicinity, and tossed the rest in the wastebasket.

One last look around the office convinced him that the scene had been reset, and very convincingly, too. His desk was cluttered with correspondence, notes, a couple of last week's *Racing Forms,* legal-looking

documents, unread advertising matter, and a miscellany of pencils. The copious ashtray was overflowing with ashes and old cigar stubs. Yes, everything was not only in perfectly normal order, but downright homelike.

On a sudden thought he went into the hall and rang for the elevator. It came up at last, a sleepy-eyed Marty Budlicek—husband of the cleaning woman—at the helm.

"Evening, Mr. Malone," Marty said in a reproachful voice. "You come up the freight elevator again. You ain't supposed to do that and you know it." He scratched his head and said, "It happens all the time."

"If anyone asks," the little lawyer said firmly, "you brought me up yourself, understand? Be sure of that."

"Have to be," Marty said gloomily. "It's my job."

"Don't worry," Malone promised. "I'll back you up." He handed Marty a cigar and added very casually, "Anyone else come up tonight?"

Marty nodded. "Couple of fellas for other floors. One of 'em is still here." He scratched his ear. "Thanks for the cigar, Mr. Malone. And don't forget, I brought you up."

Malone went back to his office, thinking it over. Yes, one of the others who had come up was still there. Very neatly done. The late Leonard Estapoole had undoubtedly been advised to get off at another floor in case he was being watched. The killer had come along, conked him with Malone's bronze Buddha, and left him dead on Malone's floor, overturning a few chairs and the wastebasket to set the scene.

He wondered unhappily and unsuccessfully who disliked him enough to go to all that trouble. There were easier ways, surely.

He looked at his watch again. Company would be coming along any minute now. He wondered what member of the police department would have gotten the tip, and hoped that it would be someone he knew. Right now he didn't feel up to making pleasant small-talk with a couple of perfect strangers.

II

Malone sat down behind his desk, relit his cold cigar, and waited. It was a minute or two—perhaps five—after ten-thirty, the hour of his appointment with the late Leonard Estapoole, when he heard the elevator door clang down the hall. He picked up one of the more important-looking papers from the pile on his desk and became extremely busy going over it.

It wasn't a perfect stranger, it was von Flanagan, of Homicide, with Klutchetsky and Scanlon hovering unobtrusively in the background. Malone put down

the paper and looked up in pleased surprise.

Von Flanagan showed even more surprise, but he appeared more puzzled than pleased. He returned Malone's greeting a little vaguely, accepted a cigar and the invitation to sit down, and sniffed the air.

"Gin," Malone said, "dropped a bottle of it. Seemed to fly right out of my hand."

"Too bad," von Flanagan said, in tones he might have used in speaking of the death of a near relative.

"Oh, there's more," Malone said unconcernedly. He flicked an ash from his cigar, glanced at the two plainclothesmen in the doorway and said, "Professional call?"

"Oh, no, no," von Flanagan said. "Just dropped by." He paused, and went on uneasily, "Fellows came along because we thought we'd go bowling if you weren't in."

"That's right," Scanlon said.

No policeman, Malone reflected, could lie convincingly enough to fool a Kansas owl, especially von Flanagan.

"But since you are here," von Flanagan said. He paused again. "Of course, if you're busy—"

"Not a bit," Malone said cheerfully. "I was just finishing up."

Everything seemed to be at a complete standstill. Von Flanagan cleared his throat noisily, tried not to look self-conscious, and finally said, "Well, I'll see you boys later."

Scanlon said, "Sure thing." Klutchetsky just managed a vague and slightly silly grin. They finally went away with all the debonair aplomb of a pair of confused sea lions.

Malone said, "Well, since this is a purely non-official call—" and reopened the *Emergency* drawer.

A few minutes later, von Flanagan seemed to relax a little. He puffed at his cigar, looked at his glass, and finally said, "As a matter of fact, Malone, I did want to ask you about one thing."

Malone looked at him questioningly and maintained a discreet silence, knowing perfectly well what it was.

"This Squires kidnapping, if there is one," von Flanagan said uncomfortably. "Leonard Estapoole's step-daughter, I mean."

The little lawyer knew he was expected to say something, and went right on saying nothing. He wished von Flanagan would come to the point, get through with what he had to say, and go away fast. Something had to be done, and soon, about the body downstairs on the fire escape. The chances were that nothing would be noticed before daylight, but this was no time to be taking unnecessary risks.

"Understand," von Flanagan

said, pure misery in his voice, "not one word has been said officially, anywhere or to anybody. The police department doesn't know anything. The Estapoole family doesn't know anything. Nobody seems to know anything." His broad face began to deepen in hue. "And now, damn it," he said angrily, "*you* don't know anything!"

"In that case," Malone said soothingly, aiming his cigar ash inaccurately at the ashtray, "what's all the screaming and hollering about?"

"Who's screaming?" von Flanagan roared. He gulped down his drink, ran a big pinkish hand across his mouth, and said entirely too calmly, "Malone, this is just a friendly visit, in the hope that you have some information, and that you'll give it to me. Unofficially, of course."

"Of course," Malone said, and let things go at that.

The big police officer looked deeply grieved. "You've held out on me a lot of times, Malone, but have I ever held it against you? No. You've made a lot of trouble for me in the past, but have I ever complained?"

"Yes," Malone said, grinning.

"Only in the line of duty," von Flanagan said. He scowled. "This is different, Malone. A child's life may be at stake. A little, four-year-old child, with blue eyes, and golden curls."

"Have you ever seen her?" Malone asked.

"No, but that's beside the point," von Flanagan growled.

"And anyway," the little lawyer said dreamily, "it isn't official." He leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. "I'll tell you anything you want to know—if I can."

"Well," von Flanagan said, clearing his throat again, "well, it's like this. There's a rumor that this Squires kid had been kidnapped. The family isn't talking to nobody about nothing. There's a rumor the family is going to make a deal. And there's a rumor you were picked to handle the deal." He stopped and looked hopefully at Malone.

Things do get around, Malone reflected. He said, "I've heard the same rumors. But that's all. And if they were true, and the kid had been kidnapped, and the family had decided to make a deal, and I had been picked to handle it, why it would be my duty to society to save the life of a beautiful blue-eyed child with golden curls and long eyelashes to keep my big mouth shut until the deal was completed."

"I was afraid you'd see it that way," von Flanagan said, and sighed. "But that wouldn't be your duty to the police department."

"But this is unofficial," Malone reminded him gently.

Von Flanagan nodded and

looked unhappy. "Well, that was it," he said at last.

It failed to explain, Malone reflected, how he'd just happened to arrive a few minutes after half past ten, with two plainclothesmen in tow.

At last von Flanagan rose, turned his hat around a few times, and said, "If you're just finishing, come along to Joe's and I'll buy you a beer."

Malone hesitated for only a minute. It would be far easier to shake von Flanagan once they were out of the office. If the big police officer hoped to pry more information loose from him over a gin-and-beer, that was just a dirty shame. If he'd planned to have Klutchetsky and Scanlon sneak back for an unofficial search of the office, that was just another dirty shame, unless they happened to go prowling around on the fire escape.

He stacked the important-looking papers into some semblance of neatness, and led the way to the elevator.

Going across Washington Street, von Flanagan remarked, "Another rumor is that Estapoole likes you the way he'd like an attack of seven-year itch."

"That," Malone said, with a bitter grin, "is no rumor."

III

Joe the Angel looked up with an expression of relief at seeing Malone safe, and in good company. He asked a question with one eyebrow, and Malone answered it with a very slight shake of the head.

The races. A minor scandal in the vice squad. Gadenski's fifth baby. Marilyn Monroe. The coming baseball season. The new show at the Blue Casino. And conversation lagged.

"Raining yet?" Joe asked.

Malone resisted every impulse to look at his watch, accepted three gin-and-beers he didn't particularly want, and wondered how soon he could tactfully make the first move toward breaking it up. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer, yawned, and remarked that tomorrow was going to be a busy day.

"Me, too," von Flanagan said, not getting up.

A little later Malone observed that he ought to be getting to bed.

"Me, too," von Flanagan said. He ordered another gin and beer. "I suffer from insomnia."

Malone said sympathetically, "Does a drink make you go to sleep?"

"No," von Flanagan said, "but it makes me satisfied to stay awake."

Conversation came to another standstill. It showed every indication of standing still all night. At last it was von Flanagan who couldn't endure it any longer.

"Know anything about the

Estapoole family?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

Joe the Angel immediately found a spot on the bar that needed polishing right next to them.

"Not much," Malone said. "Understand Estapoole's wife is quite a bit younger. There's a nephew too, I think."

"Hammond Estapoole," von Flanagan said. "He's a polo player and tennis star. Estapoole's wife was married to Ridgeway Squires, the furniture store man —another millionaire. Guess when a girl has married one millionaire it gets to be a habit. Squires got drunk and fell out a tenth floor window and died of it, a couple of years back. She used to be a model."

"Italian girl," Joe the Angel said glowingly. "Beautiful. Like so." He made appreciative curving gestures. "She used to be Carmena Bordreau."

"That's not Italian," Malone objected.

"Her first husband," Joe the Angel said, "was a very rich millionaire. He got hit by a car and died too."

Carmena's husbands, Malone reflected, seemed to have uniformly bad luck.

This time conversation not only stood still, but seemed to have died in its tracks.

After what seemed an almost unbearably long time, von Flanagan looked at his watch, appeared to be greatly surprised, and remarked, "By now, I should have been home two hours ago." He stood up.

By now, Malone thought bitterly, Klutchetsky and Scanlon will have finished giving the office a going-over and be waiting for von Flanagan to report.

"Drive you home?" von Flanagan offered casually.

Malone nodded glumly. It was six of a half-dozen, he told himself, wondering if that was what he meant. Anyway, either he waited here until it was time for von Flanagan to get safely out of the neighborhood, or else he went back to the Loop hotel that had been his home since he first passed his bar examinations and walked back to his office. He decided it would be simplest to go in the hotel, through the lobby, out the side entrance, and back to Washington Street.

At least, that was his theory.

A dark sedan was parked near the entrance to his hotel. The little lawyer paid no attention to it as he got out of von Flanagan's car, waved goodnight, and started across the sidewalk. The sedan waited until von Flanagan had driven away, then moved up a few feet.

A voice called, "Hey, Malone!"

Malone turned around and took a few steps back.

The rear door of the sedan opened and the voice said, "Get in."

The little lawyer hesitated. This was no time for interruptions, either business or social. Besides, the voice was a strange one.

"I said, *get in!*"

Malone decided that the unfamiliar voice was undoubtedly backed up by at least light artillery, and obeyed.

The car moved away fast. There were two men in the front seat. Malone couldn't remember having seen either of them before, and he wasn't getting a very good look at them now. There was a little girl beside him. He turned his head to look at her and decided right away that he didn't like her, and wasn't going to.

Even in the dim light of the street as they rode along he could see that she was about nine or ten years old, skinny, deeply tanned, wiry, and probably mean. She had mouse-colored hair in braids, braces on her teeth, owlishly thick glasses and a nasty look. She made a face at him and he resisted an impulse to make one right back.

"Where do you want us to take her, Malone?" one of the men said.

"Home," Malone said, "wherever that is."

The other man laughed.

"This isn't any time for jokes and games," the first man said. "Don't you know the Squires kid when you see her?"

Malone took a second look at what represented a rumored grand, plus what the legal mind would call other valuable considerations. He wondered if the late Leonard Estapoole could have been out of his mind.

"I don't like you," the child said.

"Good," Malone growled. "We're going to get along fine."

"Look here," the driver said. "We can't drive around all night while you two make friends. She was delivered to us to deliver to you, and we've done it. Where do you want to take her?"

"Keep driving," Malone said. "Let me think."

Think, and think fast, he told himself. The matter of Leonard Estapoole's body on the fire escape required immediate attention, but so did Leonard Estapoole's step-child. He knew that the sensible thing to do would be to drop her like a hot penny on the Estapoole doorstep. He also knew that he wasn't going to be sensible.

He turned to her and said, "What's your name?"

"Suzette," she said, with just a slight touch of a lisp, and a voice like a lonesome mosquito. "My name is Suzette Squires and I've been kidnapped, and I can't be taken home because I've been kidnapped, and I don't want to be taken home anyway because I don't like it there, and if you do

take me home I'll tell everybody you kidnapped me and beat me and wouldn't give me any food and you'll go to jail. I don't like you."

"Shut up," Malone said absent-mindedly, and amazingly she did.

Yes, Suzette would probably do just that. And in any case there would be an interminable amount of explaining to do—far, far more than his limited time allowed. Of course, he could simply deposit her at her home and drive away fast.

He turned to her again. "Where do you live?"

"Lake Forest," she said. "I bet you don't live in Lake Forest. I bet you live right in dirty horrid old Chicago with a lot of other dirty horrid people. I don't like you. I don't like Chicago. And I don't like Lake Forest either."

This time, he didn't bother to tell her to shut up. It would be Lake Forest, which as far as his immediate plans were concerned might as well be the Cape of Good Hope.

"Where to, Malone?" the driver asked again.

He had a sudden inspiration and gave them an address that was not too far away. Ma Blodgett wasn't going to like being awakened at midnight, but that was one of the multitude of problems that could always be solved with money.

"You're kidnapped," he told Suzette, "and you've got to keep quiet and stay where I put you and do what you're told, or I'll destroy you."

"I'd like that," Suzette said.

"Not the way I have in mind," Malone told her as gruesomely as he could.

There was a light in Ma Blodgett's front parlor. The driver of the dark sedan reached around to open the door to let them out, and drove away without a word. A warm spring rain was beginning to fall.

Malone rang the bell and waited, hanging grimly on to Suzette's hand, until Ma Blodgett appeared. She wore a grey flannel wrapper, and cold cream glistened on her heavy, still handsome face. Her thin, dyed black hair had been hastily pinned back. She looked at Suzette disinterestedly and at Malone questioningly, but without surprise.

"I don't like you," Suzette said.

"That's okay," Ma Blodgett said.

Malone fished out the two biggest bills in his wallet, reflecting that it was fortunate last night's poker game had turned out well, and handed them to Ma Blodgett.

"Just keep her for me for a while," he said.

"That's okay," Ma Blodgett said.

"I've been kidnapped," Su-

zette said, "so you've got to keep me." She made a face at Ma Blodgett who didn't seem to notice it.

"She has been," Malone said hastily, "and where I fit into it, I don't know yet. But I've got to park her out of sight until I find out. You'll have to keep her out of everybody's way."

"That's okay," Ma Blodgett said, steering the unprotesting Suzette through the door.

"You'll hear from me," Malone told her. He went down the steps, drawing a deep breath of relief. At least that was off his hands for a while.

He went on down the street hoping to find a taxi. What had started as a simple little frame for murder had become a very complicated frame indeed. First the victim of murder turned up on his hands, and then the victim of kidnapping. It was all part of some carefully worked out and undoubtedly elaborate plan that he didn't understand yet and wasn't going to like when he did. So far, he'd only seen the edges of it and found them to be unpleasant and frightening, and he didn't look forward in the least to exploring its core.

He'd walked nearly a block down the deserted and dimly lighted street before he began to feel that he was not alone. Pure imagination, he told himself sternly, imagination and the whispering sound of the rain falling everywhere. He walked a little faster. If there actually were footsteps behind him, it didn't mean a thing. He wasn't the only person who happened to be out late, that was all.

He walked still faster, reassured by the fact that there were street-lights just a little ways ahead now. And if the person behind him was walking faster too, why, it only meant that person was in a hurry. No, it didn't mean a thing.

He whirled around suddenly to face his pursuer just as the sound of footsteps came close behind him.

It was too dark, and everything happened too suddenly for him to see his assailant's face. But even as he started to fall he knew that he would recognize the fist that had struck him again, even if he met it in his dreams.

IV

It was a long time before Malone even tried to figure out where he was. At first he was too occupied in trying to decide if he were alive or dead, and then, whether or not he would ever be able to move again. He opened his eyelids several times before they agreed to stay open, moved his head once or twice very tentatively and decided it wasn't going to come off and go bouncing around the room.

The room was an unpleasant

one, little, and dingy and greyish, with the absolute minimum of furniture, an unwashed window, and a two-month-old calendar on the wall.

A street car went clanging by outside. Malone winced, and closed his eyes again. He had a feeling that when he opened them the next time the room would spin, in perfect rhythm with his complaining stomach.

Suddenly memory returned in a horrifying rush and he sat up on the bed, wide-awake now. The room spun for only a moment or two, and he realized it was one in a very cheap hotel. He pulled himself up, made his way to the battered dresser, looked in the tarnished mirror, and wasn't the least bit pleased with what he saw.

It wasn't just that he needed a shave, but that the unshaven face showed distinct signs of considerable wear and tear. There was a very small mouse under one blood-shot eye, a bruise on his chin, and a small cut on his puffed lip. His suit was something that would have been turned down by any self-respecting old-clothes drive, his Sulka tie was a miserable ruin, and there was blood, rainwater stains, and old mud on his shirt.

The sudden realization that bright daylight was streaming through the dirty window took his mind completely off the badly damaged image in the mirror.

He walked to the window and looked out at vaguely familiar landmarks. Madison Street. West Madison Street.

But how had he gotten there?

He felt through his pockets. Yes, everything was intact, including what little money he had left after paying Ma Blodgett.

Action was obviously called for, but just exactly what action, and in what direction, he didn't know as yet. He looked at his watch, and groaned. It was nearly seven. Well, at least he might be able to find out how he'd gotten here, and then what had been happening while he had been, so to speak, away from it all.

He went down a flight of rickety stairs to a dingy little lobby, and made highly discreet inquiries at the desk.

The clerk grinned at him and said, "You must have had a wonderful time."

"I hope I did," Malone said, "and what do I owe you, and how did I get here?" He hoped it wasn't much.

The clerk said it was two dollars, and that a friend had brought him in late last night. No, no particular description of the friend. He hadn't paid much attention. Would he recognize him again? Well, he couldn't even be sure of that.

Malone thanked him and went out into a morning that was dismal in spite of the spring sunlight and a hint of tomor-

row's summer in the soft wind that managed to reach all the way in from the lake. That brief encounter in the dark and deserted street had cost him vital time, and he didn't need to have anyone shout at him that that had been its purpose.

He stopped at a corner cigar store and telephoned his office experimentally. An unfamiliar male voice answered. Malone hung up without speaking and went on down Madison Street. Its citizens were just beginning to crawl, sleepy and bleary-eyed, out of flop houses and alleys, and his encounters with them cost him roughly two dollars in small coins.

He stopped at the next corner and called his hotel experimentally. He recognized the voice of George, the desk clerk, and said cautiously, "Mr. Malone?"

George's voice said promptly, "Mr. Malone hasn't been in all night. There are several gentlemen here waiting for him."

He thanked George politely for the warning, hung up, and stood for a minute trying to think, and wondering if the morning papers already carried an unflattering front page photograph of him as a wanted man.

He went on out on the street, glancing casually at the newsstand. No, nothing yet. But there would be. The brief pause on the sidewalk cost him another quarter, and he decided it would be cheaper to do his thinking in a taxi.

The first problem was rest, a bath, a shave, fresh clothes, a lot of food, and a comfortable place in which he could keep out of sight long enough to decide what to do next. He considered Ma Blodgett's, and gave the idea up in a hurry. He had enough worries without teaching Suzette Squires manners.

John J. Malone, wanted for murder and kidnapping. Well, it had happened to plenty of his friends in the past, and he'd always known what to do. This time, when he himself was the victim, he didn't have as much as a hint of an idea.

But it was a lead-pipe cinch he couldn't ride around in a taxi the rest of his life.

There was another and even more difficult problem. He suddenly realized that after paying the hotel, and providing eye-opener money for assorted citizens of West Madison Street, he didn't have taxi-fare to practically anywhere.

He stood for a while by the newsstand, pondering the problem. There had to be some solution to it. The only trouble was that at the moment he simply couldn't think of one.

An unoccupied cab drew up at the stand, its door opened, and a pleasantly throaty feminine voice asked for the morning *Herald-American.* Malone gal-

lantly handed it to the owner of the voice, collected the money and handed it to the bewildered newsdealer.

She was a compact, violet-eyed blonde in a wispy orchid evening dress and a fluffy pale yellow wrap that almost matched her hair. She looked at the little lawyer, reached in her rhinestone evening bag, took out a quarter and slipped it to him.

"Thank you," Malone said solemnly. "I'm saving up for taxi-fare home."

The blonde looked at him a minute longer, then produced the smile most people, blonde or not, had for John J. Malone. "You'd better get in."

Malone got in and said, "Thank you again."

"Now look here, lady—" the driver began in a worried voice.

"Don't worry about me," the blonde told him. "My mother tends to that." She flashed the smile again and asked, "Where to, pal?"

A few minutes ago Malone would have replied, "The river!" in a voice that he knew would have been both hollow and sepulchral. Now he said, "Just keep driving in a general west-northeasterly direction until I think of a roof I can pull over my head."

The driver shook his head in a disapproving manner and the taxi moved on toward the Loop.

"My name," the blonde said, "is Tommy Storm."

He lifted his somewhat battered hat. "And mine is John J. Malone."

Her eyes widened just a little. "I've heard of you." She looked him over from head to foot.

"Disappointed?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Just wondering if you're on the lam from an assault charge."

His fingers explored his cheek, and winced. "No—murder. And possibly kidnapping."

"You look as though you'd had a wonderful time. Would you like to have breakfast with me?"

Malone thought that was a superb idea and said so. She leaned forward and gave the driver an address on Walton Place.

The address turned out to be that of a pleasantly remodeled town house, half a block from Michigan Boulevard. She led him up a flight of stairs, opened a door marked 2-B and ushered him into a brightly pleasant little living room.

Suddenly he realized how terribly tired he was, how painfully his head throbbed, and how seemingly insurmountable the obstacles ahead of him were. He leaned against the doorjamb and closed his eyes for just a second.

His hostess shoved him into a chair and said, "Don't faint on the floor and wake the neighbors."

"Or your mother," Malone

said. "The one who worries for you."

"I don't have one," she said. "I'm an orphan. All alone in the world, as a matter of fact. And how do you like your eggs?"

"With gin," Malone said.

She dropped the fluffy yellow wrap on the nearest chair, pinned a gayly printed dishtowel around her waist, and pushed back her bright hair. "Just relax, Malone, and forget your troubles."

"Gin, and breakfast," Malone said faintly, "in the order named."

He lit a cigar, leaned back, made a hopeless attempt to straighten his tie, and thought a lot of nice things about Tommy Storm.

She rushed him the gin and said, "Do you want to tell all now, or after you've been fed?"

"After," Malone said, "and the eggs sunny side up."

Several minutes later, pleasant and encouraging odors began to drift out from the kitchenette. Malone poured himself another gin to help him think, and settled more comfortably in the chair.

One item had been overlooked last night, but there wouldn't have been time for it anyway, and in any case it was too late now, and besides it might not have been important anyway. That was the little matter of searching the body.

The late Leonard Estapoole had not only been a one-man anti-Malone committee, he had been a whole convention of one-man committees—anti-vice, anti-crime, anti-gambling, and probably also anti-malicious mischief, anti-walking on the grass and anything else you cared to name. As such, and acting in his purely unofficial capacity as a solid citizen and sterling character, he had collected a dangerous amount of information, complete with names and numbers, which he proposed to turn over to a Grand Jury, the newspapers, and the public at large.

That information, or at least the most dangerous part of it, should have been on his person last night. Obviously, Malone reminded himself now, he should have looked for it. On the other, and consoling hand, there was the fact that if he had looked for it, it undoubtedly wouldn't have been there. The stranger who had so expertly conked the solid citizen and sterling character with Malone's bronze Buddha, would have taken it away with him. In fact, that was probably why the whole affair had been arranged in the first place.

Malone felt a great deal better and poured himself a third gin.

Now there was only the matter of finding who had conked the one-man anti-practically-everything committee, and get-

ting that envelope of information back.

He had no doubt at all that Estapoole had had it with him. The information had been, according to report, complete. At that point newspaper speculation and rumor had broken off, and word-of-mouth took over. The Estapoole step-child had been kidnapped. The asking price was a hundred grand and the information. Leonard Estapoole, adoring husband and devoted stepfather, had agreed to make the deal.

He'd had to have been pretty damned adoring and devoted to ransom that step-child, Malone thought. And that reminded him of something else.

He picked up Tommy Storm's telephone, called Ma Blodgett and inquired after her young visitor.

"She's okay," Ma Blodgett said.

Malone said, "Find out if she knows me. Find out if she knows my name. Or if she recognized me. If she doesn't, give her busfare and turn her loose."

"Okay," Ma Blodgett said.

There, that was off his mind. Suzette would make her way home safely, he hoped. Or someone would take her home. Nothing had been even whispered to the police so far, and now the chances were that nothing would be. There hadn't been any kidnapping and there wouldn't be any kidnapping charge against Malone. The world was getting visibly brighter with every passing minute, the ache in his head was promising to go away. It was full spring outdoors, and at that moment, Tommy came in with a tray of breakfast which she placed on the low coffee table in front of him.

There were eggs fried exactly the way he liked them, pink ham that curled delicately up at the edges, a golden mound of fried potatoes, a plate of crisply hot buttered toast, a jar of strawberry jam, a steaming pot of coffee, and a pitcher of thick, yellow cream.

Half an hour later Malone looked up from the empty dishes and sighed happily. He unwrapped a cigar with loving care, lit it, and looked appreciatively at the bright-haired, violet-eyed Tommy, at the pleasantly comfortable little living room with its gayly patterned curtains, its cheerful prints on the walls, and its big, welcoming chairs. He wished with all his heart that he had nothing at all to do, all that day and quite possibly the next.

Tommy poured herself a cup of coffee, lit a cigarette, and said, "Well?"

"The police are looking for me," he told her unconcernedly, "and probably the whole city of Chicago, if the papers are out by now. *For murder.*"

"Fine thing," she scolded him affectionately, "and you hide out

here and ruin a hard-working chorus girl's reputation."

"Not only murder," he told her blandly, "but probably attempted extortion. And there may still be kidnapping to worry about."

He called Ma Blodgett again. No. Suzette didn't know him from Adam's lead mule, had no idea who'd kidnapped her, and had never heard of John J. Malone. The little lawyer breathed a sigh of relief.

"Turn her loose," he ordered.

"She won't go," Ma Blodgett said.

Malone swore indignantly into the telephone. "Tell her she's got to. Tell her that her mother is worrying herself sick. Tell her the whole city is worrying about her. Tell her she's in danger. Tell her it's against the law."

"I did," Ma Blodgett said. "She won't go."

Malone swore again. "Get a taxi and take her. Don't tell her where you're going. Take her somewhere and lose her. Somewhere in the general direction of Lake Forest. Then forget her."

"Okay," Ma Blodgett said.

"That takes care of the kidnapping," Tommy observed. "Are you going to do anything about the murder?"

Malone shook his head at her and was silent, thinking hard. She watched him for a moment, shrugged her shoulders and went into the next room.

An idea was beginning to form in his mind, it might work and it might not. But in any case, now was the time to lay the foundation. He picked up the phone book and went through it. Martin Budlicek.

A very sleepy and very irritated Sophie Budlicek answered. Her voice immediately became amiable and a little anxious when she recognized Malone's. Was anything wrong in the office?

"Not a thing," Malone lied cheerfully. Evidently, he reflected, Sophie Budlicek didn't know what had been happening. But for that matter, neither did he.

Didn't Marty Budlicek have a brother in Waukesha, Wisconsin? That was good. Let him talk to Marty.

It took a little persuading, the promise of a fair-sized sum of cash money, a reminder of the time Malone had gotten young John Budlicek out of jail, and an appeal to old-time friendship to convince Marty Budlicek that he and Sophie ought to make a quick visit to Waukesha and not talk to anybody on the way or let anyone know where they were going. And it was particularly important that they go immediately, before any police officers came around asking questions. He would, he added, explain everything.

He could picture Marty Budlicek moving like a jet-propelled hurricane at the mere mention

of police. They had been very largely responsible for Marty's rapid decline from high income brackets as a beer runner to the insignificant job of piloting an elevator.

"But Malone," Marty protested, "last night—"

"Never mind last night," Malone said testily. "I'll talk to you later. Has your brother a telephone? He has? Good. Now *move!*"

"I'm moving," Marty said, already breathlessly, "but Malone—"

"Get going." He hung up fast.

Tommy had come back, changed into a pale green wool suit that would have made an octogenarian think of springtime.

"You really are up the stump, aren't you," she said, fastening the last button of her jacket. "No, don't worry, I'm not going out to call a cop. I'm just going to get the later papers and see where we stand."

"We?" Malone said hopefully.

"Remember Lee Merchant? You got him out of a murder rap. The girl he married afterward used to be my roommate. They're very happy. There's another reason I like you, too, but it'll keep."

He reflected that it wasn't always true that bread cast upon the waters came back all wet.

The newspaper front pages told him everything he needed to know, including the fact that he didn't photograph well.

"It's an old picture," he told Tommy Storm apologetically, "taken at the time of the Renshaw trial."

The body of Leonard Estapoole had been discovered in John J. Malone's office by Mary Margaret O'Leary, John J. Malone's secretary, some time after her arrival at the office. It had been in the private office, according to the story, and she hadn't had to go in there when she first arrived. The murdered man had been found on the office floor, having been struck on the head by some heavy object. John J. Malone was being sought by the police for immediate questioning.

There would, he knew, be more details later. This was just the first quick flash. He smiled to himself, thinking of Maggie. Her first act on getting to the office was invariably to open the doors and windows of the private office in hopes of airing out the stale cigar smoke. This morning she'd undoubtedly spent the next half hour or so frantically trying to locate him by telephone, and finally decided she couldn't postpone discovering the body any longer.

But there was no mention of the kidnapping. Nor was there any speculation as to what the late Leonard Estapoole had been

doing in that particular office in the first place. The gist of it was simply, "Man found murdered, Malone sought." He sighed and tossed the paper away.

"I hope you know what you're going to do," Tommy said in an anxious voice.

"I hope so too," he told her. The simplest and by far the pleasantest thing to do would be to stay right here for the rest of his life. But it wouldn't be practical. He sighed again. Besides, the idea that had been forming in his mind was definitely taking shape.

"Whatever it is, you'd better shave first, and take a bath," she said, "unless you want vagrancy to be added to murder and kidnapping. There's a razor and stuff in the bathroom." She added a little hastily, "My brother keeps them there for when he happens to be in town."

It was an excellent and expensive razor, and so were the rest of the shaving needs. Malone decided it would be more polite not to remind his hostess that she was an orphan and all alone in the world.

Half an hour later not only did the world seem a far better place, but he felt almost able to face it. Tommy Storm looked him over critically.

"Outside of the fact that your clothes look a little as though you'd been sleeping under somebody's sofa, you'll do." She poured another gin. "What are you going to do about the cops?"

"Avoid them like the bubonic plague," Malone said grimly. He added, "Until I can throw them a fish, that is." The idea had not only formed now, but he was beginning to add a few decorations. He grinned at her.

"Of course," she said, "you could always wear pink sunglasses, and a green beard, or something. Unless you can think of a better disguise."

"I can," he told her. "I'm going to disguise myself as an innocent man. That's where the fish comes in." He looked around the engagingly decorated room. "Meantime, I'd like to spend a night here."

She didn't move as much as one bit of an eyebrow. "When?"

"Last night," Malone said. "All of it, and practically all of today."

"Not only my reputation," she mused, "but my neck, too. All right, Malone, you were here."

He straightened his tie again, did his best to brush off his hat, and paused at the door to tell her he'd be back, alive and well.

"Don't ever forget, Malone," she said slowly, "I'm on your side."

V

The little lawyer thought that over as he went down the steps into the spring sunlight. There was something about it that he

didn't quite understand. In fact, there were a lot of things he didn't understand, so far. But at least he did know what he had to do next.

There was always the chance that a corner cop would recognize him, or a passing prowl car pick him up. But that was the chance he had to take. He walked to the Drive slowly and leisurely, wearing an air of great unconcern. There was no point in avoiding the main thoroughfares, if he was going to be found he was going to be found, and that was that.

But this morning, no one noticed him. A fine thing, he told himself, here a man wanted as a murder suspect, with his picture on the front page, could go strolling about in broad and sunny daylight, with no one giving him a second glance. He made a mental note to bring the subject up with von Flanagan next time they met.

A traffic cop reproved him mildly for starting against the lights when he crossed the Drive. Outside of that nobody spoke to him. He continued on his way and finally turned into a tall apartment building whose address was known from coast to coast, and not too politely.

The elevator operator, who doubled as a bodyguard, greeted him cordially with, "Swell morning, Mr. Malone," and no mention of a little trouble in the morning papers. As usual the elevator made no stops until it reached the floor that had been occupied for fifteen years by the man who owned a number of varied enterprises, including a profitable string of gambling establishments, and, just to make everything homelike, the building itself.

As always, Max Hook welcomed the little lawyer like a long absent friend, and as always, Malone looked around the big room to admire and be amazed at the product of the latest in a long series of interior decorators. This one had gone in heavily for the early Colonial, and Max Hook, a pink-faced mountain of fat behind the battered roll-top, golden-oak desk that had come with him from back of the Yards, didn't look as though he liked it.

"Having a little difficulty?" the big gambler asked very casually.

Malone took out his third cigar of the day and began to unwrap it slowly. "You might call it that. What happened?"

"You probably know as much as I do," Max Hook said. He took out a violet-tinted and probably perfumed cigarette and lit it delicately. "The Squires' kid. Nobody has anything official about it. Family hasn't said a word. Newspapers haven't said a word either. But you know, and I know, and the police and a

heluva lot of other people know that the kid was snatched. She's been missing since yesterday morning."

Malone said nothing. If Ma Blodgett had done her stuff promptly, the Squires kid wasn't going to be missing long. Possibly she was even home by now. But there was no point in telling Max Hook everything he knew. Not yet, anyway.

"So you get picked as go-between," Max Hook went on. "Why you? Because some of the dirt old man Estapoole had dug up and had agreed to turn over had to do with some of your clients. And because somebody had to be framed, and you were a likely prospect. Old man Estapoole was laying for you and everybody knew it. So it would look logical for him to turn up dead in your office, and the stuff he was to turn over to you missing."

"For a man who hasn't left his apartment in fifteen years," Malone said admiringly, "you get around."

"I have sources," the big man said modestly.

Malone lit his cigar and gave a quick account of what had happened, beginning with the appointment, made by Leonard Estapoole himself, and including the well-timed visit of von Flanagan and two aides. "Sometime during the night," he finished, "someone came back to the office and moved everything back. Leaving me what might be lightly termed a fugitive from justice. Or maybe a fugitive from injustice, I don't know."

Max Hook looked at him expectently and said nothing.

"The point is," Malone said, "I've been framed, and now the only way I can be free to get places and do things is to frame somebody else. With his consent, of course, and with suitable compensation and protection." Where he was going to get the suitable compensation was something he'd have to worry about later.

There was a long silence. Then Max Hook said very slowly, "It's important to me to get hold of that stuff old man Estapoole had dug up. There's a list of nice little business places of mine in there. All nice, quiet little places, I always like to have things nice. I wouldn't want to have the managers and the customers bothered. So I'd like the list."

"Easy," Malone said with completely false confidence. "Just a matter of finding out who took it from Leonard Estapoole, and getting it back."

There was an even longer silence. Finally, "It's worth a little investment on my part. I think everything can be fixed up for you, Malone."

Malone sighed with relief and said, "The rest can be left up to me."

It took a little time and a little doing. George la Cerra, better known to Malone as Little Georgie the Cherry, came in with a tray of bottles, glasses, and a box of cigars, offered Malone his sympathy, took a few orders from Max Hook, and went away again.

Max Hook mixed himself an obnoxious looking pinkish concoction, tasted it, looked at it, poured it in the wastebasket, threw the violet-tinted cigarette in after it, said, "the hell with that," ignored the box on the table and accepted one of Malone's cigars, and poured himself gin with a beer chaser.

"Old man Estapoole was getting to be a pest," he said at last. He went into a lengthy description of the various ways in which the murdered man had been making himself a pest, and then branched off into a discourse on the Estapoole family. Carmena, it appeared, was not only a doll but a dream doll. For an ex-model and an ex-chorus girl from the old Rialto, the little girl had done right well for herself. Old man Estapoole had been married before. No family, though, except one nephew.

"Another pest," Max Hook said. "Owes dough to at least four of my joints. Never got tough with him because of his uncle, and he knew we wouldn't. Now things are going to be a little different." He said that with a certain grim satisfaction. "Does all right with the dames though. He's a good picker."

Malone nodded. The name of Hammond Estapoole turned up with unsurprising frequency in the gossip columns.

"Understand the latest one's a cute blonde," Max Hook said, turning his glass around in his hand. "Name of Tommy Storm."

Malone sat very still and said nothing. Something was very wrong, and he didn't know just what it was. The curly-haired blonde's coming along that morning had seemed providential, now it seemed to have been deliberately providential. He wasn't at all sure just how she had fitted herself into the picture puzzle, and even less sure that he was going to like her reasons. But the point was that, at the moment, she constituted his one and only alibi.

And just how much Max Hook knew about it was another thing he couldn't figure and didn't think ought to be questioned about, not right now anyway.

Before he could do much worrying about it, Little Georgie came back with a heavy-set, dark-haired, scarfaced man in a Hollywood style suit that came dangerously close to being purple. Malone recognized him as one Frank McGinnis, better known to his friends and enemies as Swiveleye.

Swiveleye McGinnis, it seem-

ed, was cheerfully willing to go along with the gag for suitable compensation, to be paid by Max Hook, and the promise of absolute protection, to be supplied by Malone. But only, he made very plain, for forty-eight hours or less. The longest he'd ever been held in jail was two days, and he didn't want to spoil his record.

Well, forty-eight hours was better than nothing, Malone reminded himself. If he couldn't straighten things out in that time, he could always go to Guatamala and, he warned himself sternly, he might as well.

"You'll be picked up in your hotel on a tip," Malone told him. "The elevator operator will recognize you. Then you break down and talk. Von Flanagan will promise you the world and a free round-trip ticket to Mars if you talk. He'll want to know who hired you. Nobody hired you. You'd heard that Leonard Estapoole had all this dirt he'd dug up and you wanted it. You wanted to get anything about you that was in his collection, and the rest you knew you could peddle to your pals. Are you with me so far?"

"With you," the scarfaced man said, grinning.

"You'd heard Leonard Estapoole was going to my office. You got there sometime after midnight. Nobody was around, he was evidently waiting for me. There was a struggle—not much of one. You bashed him on the head. Maybe you didn't mean to hit him so hard. You got the envelope, got out of there, went home and completely destroyed the envelope. Got it?"

"Got it," Swiveleye McGinnis said, still grinning.

There was a brief three-way debate as to whether the forty-eight hours should begin right now, or when the cops arrived to pick him up on the tip that would be artfully planted by Little Georgie. Malone and Max Hook outvoted him, and the deal was made.

"Act natural," Malone said.

There remained the minor matter of sending someone to Waukesha to contact Marty Budlicek, who was probably thoroughly confused and worried by now. Again there was a little matter of compensation which Max Hook handled, but a slightly smaller one. The instructions were simple ones. He'd taken Leonard Estapoole, or someone resembling him, up to Malone's floor sometime after midnight. A while later—he was to be very vague about times—he'd taken up someone resembling Frank McGinnis. McGinnis had come down a little later. He, Marty Budlicek, had gone off duty and gone home to sleep. The morning papers had carried the story of the murder and he'd gotten frightened and fled. But his brother in Waukesha had advised

him to come back and go to the police.

"You'd better make sure he rehearses it," Malone told Little Georgie. "It's pretty complicated for Marty."

Just to make everything secure, he phoned Marty Budlicek in Waukesha, told him what and whom to expect, and what to do.

"Anything," the worried Marty said, "anything you say. But listen a minute, Malone—"

Malone said he didn't have a minute, and whatever it was could wait.

He crushed out his cigar, started to unwrap a fresh cigar, and said, "Forty-eight hours isn't much, but it'll have to do. Don't worry." He poured another gin and beer and prepared to depart.

"Who worries?" Max Hook said. "But what are you going to do?"

Malone didn't have the faintest idea, and wasn't going to say so. "Sleep," he said.

He blinked drowsily.

He could use a little compensation himself, he reflected. As long as the police were looking for him, there wasn't any way Maggie could get money to him, and none for her to get to him even if there was a way. Only yesterday she'd reminded him of the condition not only of his bank account but of the Emergency Fund. There was always Joe the Angel, but that would have to wait too. And he was damned if he was going to ask Max Hook.

"You'll be working for me as well as yourself," the big gambler said, "so I should pay half the expenses."

Malone murmured something grateful and politely refrained from looking at the folded bill before slipping it in his pocket.

Forty-eight hours. No, it wasn't much. Maybe some remote Pacific isle would be a pleasanter place than Guatamala to spend his declining years.

VI

Malone took a chance on a taxicab and gave the address of Tommy Storm.

Halfway there he looked at the bill Max Hook had handed him, and told the driver to stop at a liquor store. Not only did he not want to return to Tommy Storm empty handed, but he wasn't going to ask a cab driver to change a hundred-dollar-bill at a time when he was trying to remain inconspicuous.

The clerk was leaning on his elbows reading an early afternoon paper when Malone went in. But it was too late to turn around.

"Yes, sir?" the clerk said, straightening up and smiling.

A second stop at a florist's for an armful of roses brought a similar response.

At the corner of Walton

Place the cab was momentarily involved in a minor traffic jam. The driver took advantage of the pause to comment on the murder of Leonard Estapoole, the fact that from all accounts Leonard Estapoole had been asking for it, but that was a terrible thing just the same.

Malone agreed that it was a terrible thing.

The traffic jam melted and the cab moved on. The driver remarked on the fact that he, for one, didn't believe that lawyer had anything to do with it. "If John J. Malone was that sore at anybody, he wouldn't bother with murder."

"You know him?" Malone asked timidly.

"Know him!" the driver said, stopping expertly in front of Tommy Storm's. "I should say I do! Wonderful guy—and what a spender! The tips that guy gives!"

Malone tipped him a dollar and fled up the steps. The front-page newspaper photograph had evidently been worse than he'd thought.

Inside the apartment, he looked at Tommy Storm reflectively and for a long time. She'd been properly appreciative of the small offerings and had installed him in the most comfortable chair, with a drink and an ash-tray at his elbow. What was more, she had tactfully refrained from asking questions about what he had done, and what he intended to do next.

There was nothing that could be done, immediately. It was going to take a little time for the carefully planted tip to reach the proper ears, for Swiveleye McGinnis to be apprehended, for Marty Budlicek to give his damaging testimony, and most of all, for Swiveleye to break down and confide. Meantime, all he could do was wait.

Here he was, he reminded himself, in a cosy little nest, with spring sunlight streaming in the windows. He had a gin and beer at his elbow, and a lighted cigar in his hand. In a little while he wouldn't have anything to worry about, at least for forty-eight hours. He had money in his pockets, of course eventually he'd have to earn it, but not right now. And he had time to kill with a delightful little blonde.

He should relax, and be content. But he couldn't do either.

He got up and began to prowl about the room, restlessly and aimlessly. Something was wrong, he didn't know just what it was, but he could feel it.

What had to be done in the next forty-eight hours suddenly loomed up as an almost unsurmountable problem. Someone had lured the late Leonard Estapoole to his office, killed him, taken the dangerous folder of papers—assuming that Leonard Estapoole had had it with him—

and arranged what should have been a fool-proof frame. That it had not been successful was entirely due to a hunch, quick thinking, and some rare good luck.

A double frame, he thought, built to fit him as snugly as a set of storm windows. First the murder of Leonard Estapoole. Then the planting on him of the kidnapped Suzette Squires. Finally the little matter of knocking him out and parking him in a West Madison Street hotel was to have tied everything nicely together. The clerk at the hotel wasn't going to remember him, and the "friend" who had brought him in wasn't going to be found. And in any case, there would be the question of just when he had arrived at the hotel.

The purpose of knocking him out and tucking him away for the rest of the night had not only been to keep him from providing himself, unknowingly, with an alibi—since the original frame hadn't worked—but to keep him from removing the body of Leonard Estapoole and the accompanying evidence for a second time.

So it was a damned good thing all around that he was alert, quick-thinking, agile, sagacious, and well-nigh brilliant, he told himself modestly.

"Another five minutes of that," Tommy Storm observed amiably, "and you'll owe me a new rug."

He grinned at her and sat down.

There was still so much that had to be done, and all of it in forty-eight hours. But none of it had to be done right now, in fact, none of it could be done right now. He still had time on his hands. Again he looked appreciatively at Tommy Storm.

It was pure coincidence that she was a girl friend of Hammond Estapoole. Lots of blondes undoubtedly were. It was likewise nothing but coincidence that she'd happened to be on West Madison Street at that hour of the morning. Just going home from a very late party somewhere in the suburbs, and maybe the taxi-driver had gotten lost. And the fact that she'd stopped for a newspaper at that particular corner was, without question, one of the happiest coincidences of his lifetime.

Her offering him a ride, and her inviting him in for breakfast, had been nothing more than perfect hospitality, and the deed of a good samaritan. No, he told himself, there was nothing even remotely suspicious, not to say sinister, about the situation, and even if there had been, this was no time to worry about it. He sighed happily.

The sun was just getting ready to set when he got around to wondering about the unexplained

remark she'd made. "Don't ever forget, Malone—I'm on your side." What had she meant by that? But right now, he reflected, was no time to bring it up.

Spring twilight was settling down comfortably over the back yard seen through her windows when she went out for the evening papers. Malone took one look at the first page and began to breathe easier.

Everything had fallen into place perfectly, and as planned. The astute police, acting on an unrevealed tip, had brought Frank "Swiveleye" McGinnis in for questioning. The night elevator operator of Malone's office building had been located in Milwaukee at the home of his brother, Joe Budlicek, where he had fled in terror on realizing that he had been practically a witness to a murder.

Having been promised protection, Marty had told of taking Leonard Estapoole up very late in the evening, and of taking Frank "Swiveleye" McGinnis up a little later. McGinnis had come down again, but not Estapoole. He positively identified McGinnis. No one else had entered or left the building after John J. Malone had gone out about eleven o'clock, in the company of Lieutenant Daniel von Flanagan.

Von Flanagan had explained his presence to the press with the statement that he and the missing attorney were old friends, and he had dropped by on a personal matter.

Faced with the elevator operator's story, Swiveleye had given up. Yes, he'd gone to Malone's office, following Leonard Estapoole. He'd been hearing about the anti-everything information Leonard Estapoole had dug up at his own expense, and he wanted to get his hands on it. Murder, though, had been the farthest thing from his mind.

His idea had been to hold up Leonard Estapoole, get the papers or whatever he had, tear up anything pertaining to himself, and peddle the rest to his friends and acquaintances. For that reason he'd trailed Leonard Estapoole right to John J. Malone's private office. But the solid citizen and sterling character had made a dive at him before he could get his gun out. He'd grabbed the first thing he could reach—a bronze Buddha paper-weight—and thrown it.

He hadn't even known Leonard Estapoole was dead until he read it in the newspapers.

No, there hadn't been any envelope, or papers, or anything of the sort on Leonard Estapoole's body.

It was, he maintained, purely self-defense.

And that was that.

Malone put down the paper and said, "Swiveleye McGinnis takes an even worse newspaper

picture than I do." He yawned, stretched, and added, "I'd better go down and go to work as his defense attorney. Obviously, self-defense. At the very worst, manslaughter."

Tommy's eyes widened another fraction of an inch. "You're really going to do that?"

"He seems to need a good lawyer," Malone said. "The best, in fact."

On a sudden impulse he picked up the telephone, dialed police headquarters and asked for von Flanagan. The voice that came out of the receiver was an indignant roar.

"Malone! Where the hell are you? Where the hell have you been?"

"I'm right here," Malone told him cheerfully. "Been here all along. What's this about a murder in my office? Where were the police? What do we pay taxes for?"

For a moment the receiver threatened to melt in Malone's hand.

"I've been trying to reach you since this morning," von Flanagan finally calmed down enough to say. "Your hotel—your office—Joe the Angel's—"

"You just tried the wrong places," Malone said. "Fact is, it got a little late out last night, after I left you. So I've been catching up on lost sleep while you let murders go ahead and happen right here in my office—"

"Damn it, Malone, where are you?"

Malone asked with his eyebrows if it was all right to reveal where he was, and Tommy Storm answered with her eyes that it certainly was. He said into the telephone, "I'm in Tommy Storm's apartment on Walton Place."

"Well, get right down here," the police officer snapped at him. "No, wait. Meet me in your office. And, fast."

"Fifteen minutes," Malone said, and hung up. He grinned at the telephone and said, "In just about the time it takes for him to look up the number in the phone book, he's going to call."

Roughly two minutes later, he did. "Malone?"

"Yes?"

"I just thought—never mind, I'll tell you when I see you."

The receiver clicked dead again.

"Skeptical character," Malone said. "Well, at least he knows I'm really here."

"I hope you know what you're going to do, Malone," Tommy Storm said, a shade apprehensively.

"So do I," Malone said. He looked thoughtfully at the telephone. One thing he'd better check on, to be on the safe side. He called Ma Blodgett.

There was relief in her voice.

"Good thing you called. She came back."

Malone swore into the telephone.

"All the way from Howard Street," Ma Blodgett told him. "Just a while ago, she came back. Now, she won't go, again."

Malone swore even more enthusiastically. "I'll take care of her," he said at last, wondering how. "Just keep her until I get there."

"Can't do anything else," Ma Blodgett said wearily.

The little lawyer unwrapped a cigar and scowled at it. "I'm still a kidnapper. How the devil do you get a kidnap victim to go home?" That was a problem to be dealt with later. The bruise under his eye was beginning to throb again, and even his bones were complaining with weariness. He sighed and poured himself another gin.

If Tommy Storm was going to volunteer any information, now was the time for her to do it. He waited. She didn't.

"Well," he said at last, and hesitantly, "thank you for the hospitality. And the alibi." He gulped the gin, put the glass down hard, and said explosively, "Damn it, what did you mean this morning—that you were on my side?"

"Just exactly that." She put her cigarette out, nervously lighted a new one. Suddenly her eyes met his. "All right Malone, I told you the babe Lee Merchant married was my pal. Let's say I heard a rumor you might be in some kind of a jam last night or this morning, and thought I'd stick around and see if you needed a helping hand. You did. Shall we leave it at that?"

He looked at her for a moment. "Yes."

There were any number of questions he wanted to ask, but none of them seemed to be quite proper etiquette under the circumstances. But he'd be seeing her again, and not too much later, either. He mentally measured her wrist for something suitable in the way of a more concrete "thank you," and was on his way.

VII

A frightened relief elevator operator told him, in an unnecessary whisper, that the police were waiting for him. The police, and a few other people.

The few other people were a white-faced Maggie, a worried-looking Marty Budlicek, and a very dour Swiveleye McGinnis. There were chalk marks on the floor showing where Leonard Estapoole's body had been. Malone glanced at them and glanced away delicately. The head, he noticed, had been in the exact spot where he had adroitly spilled the gin. Whoever

reset the scene last night had done a very exact and expert job. Only one detail was missing, and that was the bronze Buddha.

"No reporters?" Malone said pleasantly, coming in.

Von Flanagan mopped his brow with a slightly soiled and damp-looking handkerchief. "This here's private," he said. He looked unhappily at Malone. "This isn't just a nice, quiet little murder, Malone. This guy Estapoole was important. Everybody's been on my neck all day. Everybody. And where have you been all that time? Sleeping!"

"I was tired," Malone said. He relit his cigar. Somehow he managed to smile at Maggie and Marty Budlicek with an assurance he didn't come anywhere near feeling.

"But it happened right in your office,"" von Flanagan said accusingly.

"Is that my fault?" He glared at von Flanagan indignantly. "I ought to sue the city. Look at that rug!"

Before von Flanagan could think of an answer, Maggie said, "Malone, I didn't know what to do. I went into your office to leave some papers on your desk —I don't know what time it was—"

"Nine-forty-six," Officer Scanlon said.

Malone beamed at him approvingly. "Nice to see you again. You too, Klutchetsky. Just how was the bowling?"

"Fair," Klutchetsky said.

"Damn it," von Flanagan began angrily, "we're here on business—"

"Malone," Maggie went on fast, "I found the body. And—well, I didn't know what to do. And I didn't know where you were. So I called the police."

"Quite right," Malone said. His eyes met hers in a long look of silent appreciation for the time she'd spent trying to reach him before she called the police. "Always call the cops when you find a body. It's one of the first rules in the book."

He tossed his hat at the hatrack and sat down behind his desk. "But it's too bad you weren't able to reach me. This young man should have had an attorney right at first, then he wouldn't have been bullied and browbeaten into making a confession under duress."

"He did no such thing," von Flanagan said furiously. "Nobody laid a finger on him. Nobody said anything to him." He drew a long breath. "However, confronted with the incontrovertible evidence of an unimpeachable witness placing him at the scene of the crime, he made a voluntary confession."

Malone said admiringly, "Wow!"

"And besides," von Flanagan said in an irritated voice, "you're not his lawyer."

"I am now," Malone said. He looked reassuringly at Swiveleye and said, "Don't worry about a thing."

"Mr. Malone—" Marty Budlicek began anxiously.

Malone gestured him to silence with a wave of his cigar. "Later, Marty, later." He scowled at von Flanagan and said, "Is there any purpose to this little gathering, or is it purely social?"

"Plenty of purpose," von Flanagan said. "Swiveleye here is gonna show us how he done it. And seeing as how it was your office, we thought you'd appreciate being here."

"My office, and my client," Malone said. He turned to Marty Budlicek and said, choosing his words carefully, "Just what did you tell the police?"

Marty looked unhappy, hesitated a moment, caught Malone's warning look, and said, "Just what happened. After you an' this other feller—von Flanagan—after you went out. Quite a while after. This guy that was killed, real skinny guy, he come up. Got off the floor below this. Guess he must of walked up. Then this here guy,"—he pointed at the glum-faced Swiveleye —"he come up, an' he got off the floor below too. Guess he must of walked up too. Right behind the first guy, he was."

"See?" von Flanagan said triumphantly.

"I see," Malone said. "And then what?"

"Well then, this here guy,"—again he pointed—"he come down again after a while. The other guy, he never did come down."

"No," Malone said softly, "he never did."

There was a little silence.

"Look here," von Flanagan said suddenly, "when this guy came down, how did he seem? Was he in a hurry, or excited, or scared, or anything like that?"

"You mean, did he act like he'd just killed some guy?" Marty Budlicek asked. "Huh-uh. He just come down."

The big police officer looked disappointed for just a moment, then highly pleased. "See, Malone? He didn't show any signs of emotion. Just a cold-blooded killer."

Malone said two very rude words.

"Mr. Malone," Marty Budlicek began again, even more anxiously. "Mr. Malone, listen—" The little elevator man turned pleadingly to von Flanagan. "Can I see Mr. Malone alone for just a minute?"

"No," von Flanagan said.

"Stop picking on him," Malone said. "He's not the one under arrest. He's the witness, remember? And I know what he wants to say anyhow. He's scared to death because he's mixed up in a killing. His in-

formation led you to make an arrest. And how does he know that between now and the time of trial—assuming you can make this absurd charge stick—he won't be killed, or his wife won't be killed, or his house won't be dynamited?"

Marty Budlicek moaned faintly.

"The police," von Flanagan said, "give protection."

Malone snorted. "The police," he said acidly, "did one hell of a fine job of protecting my carpet."

"Now look here, Malone—" von Flanagan began.

Malone ignored him. "Don't worry, Marty," he said soothingly. "In an important case like this—a very important case like this, with a big shot like Mr. Leonard Estapoole found murdered, and a lot of political implications involving a lot of people, the police really protect their witnesses."

Von Flanagan opened his mouth to speak, and shut it again.

"The police," Malone went on, "put up their important witnesses—like you and Sophie for instance—in some fine, luxurious hotel, under an assumed name, and with a twenty-four hour police guard."

Marty Budlicek's watery blue eyes widened incredulously.

"You have to stay there, of course," Malone said, "but you have all kinds of comforts. Send out for anything you want to eat or drink. Have a TV set installed. The works."

Von Flanagan glared at Malone, who glared right back at him. It was Malone who won.

"Oh, all right," von Flanagan said. "Klutchetsky, you see to it."

Marty Budlicek gulped twice and said, "Yes, but Mr. Malone—"

"Another time," Malone said. "Right now I want to hear what kind of fantastic story the cops have rigged up."

"Fantastic, hell!" von Flanagan said. His face had been slowly turning a deep magenta. Now it was working toward purple. "It's *his* story. Let *him* tell it."

"Go ahead," Malone told Swiveleye.

"It was self-defense," Swiveleye said, and clammed up.

"Go on," von Flanagan said in exasperation. "Go *on!* Leonard Estapoole had an envelope full of valuable papers with detailed information that might—that would—get you and your pals in a lot of hot water, right?"

Swiveleye nodded.

"You wanted those papers, didn't you? You didn't want them just to protect yourself, but because you could make a little money off them, right?"

Swiveleye nodded again.

Von Flanagan took a long breath. "You'd been following

Leonard Estapoole, looking for a chance to get that envelope away from him, weren't you?"

Another nod.

"You followed him here, to this building. You watched the elevator indicator and saw where he got out. Then you took the elevator to the same floor. You realized he had climbed the stairs to the next floor. So you climbed the stairs to the next floor. You saw that he'd gone into this office. So you came on into this office."

Von Flanagan's eyes gleamed.

Swiveleye varied his routine with a mute, affirmative shrug of his thin shoulders.

"You either did or didn't pull a gun on him," von Flanagan went on relentlessly.

This time Swiveleye shook his head.

"All right. Before you had a chance to pull a gun, Leonard Estapoole, suspecting what you were up to, tried to protect himself. There was a struggle. Chairs were overturned. You were afraid he was getting the best of you. So you picked up that heavy bronze paper-weight from the desk—you grabbed it up—and slugged him."

Swiveleye nodded, a little bored with it all.

"He told it very nicely," Malone said approvingly, after a pause. He looked at Swiveleye. "And with all that fuss and bother—not to mention murder—you didn't get the papers after all?"

Swiveleye made a highly expressive gesture indicating not only the complete absence of papers, but stating what he thought of the whole proceedings.

"Leonard Estapoole probably expected just some such attempt, and has all this valuable information put away in a safe place," von Flanagan said.

"That may be and it may not be," Malone said, "and right now it doesn't matter much. What does matter is that this is as perfect a case of self-defense as I ever saw, in a lifetime of practice. Why, just look at it! My client here was fighting for his life.

"Leonard Estapoole wasn't a young man, but he wasn't an old one either, and probably kept himself in good physical shape. Easily a match for my friend McGinnis here. And for all McGinnis knew, he was armed. It would have been the logical thing to assume."

He warmed to his subject as he went on. "A man carrying valuable documents—incriminating documents—alone at night would almost certainly be armed. My client felt sure he was armed. Why, the chances are that Leonard Estapoole happened to make some move which caused my client to think he was reaching for a gun. Isn't that so, McGin-

nis? Didn't you think Estapoole was reaching for a gun?"

Swiveleye McGinnis nodded again, but this time it was with unbounded enthusiasm.

"There you have it," Malone said in triumph. "My client, battling to save his life, was sure he saw his adversary, Leonard Estapoole reaching for his gun. In sheer desperation he clutched at the first object that came to hand—in this case, a bronze Buddha paper-weight — and struck a blow in self-defense. Not a blow intended to kill, but pure self-defense!"

Von Flanagan made an elaborate pretense of looking all around the room, behind the door, and even under the desk. "Funny thing," he said nastily, "I could have sworn there was a jury in here somewhere."

"Just the same," Malone said, "that's the way it was, and that's the way it's going to be."

The big policeman shrugged his shoulders. "What happens in a courtroom," he said, "is not in my department."

"If it ever gets to a courtroom," the little lawyer said confidently. "I'll have him out in," —he looked at his watch—"considerably less than forty-eight hours from now. And now if I can use my office for a while—"

Von Flanagan shrugged his shoulders. "Klutchetsky, you and Scanlon take the prisoner down to the car. And be careful."

"He won't try to escape," Malone said blandly. "Not with a lawyer like he's got."

"And take this little guy along too," von Flanagan said, ignoring Malone. "Get him and his wife put up in a nice hotel. Put a guard on 'em. That's all."

He turned to the little lawyer after they'd gone. "No hard feelings, Malone?"

"Hell, no," Malone said. "You get a suspect, I get a client. Sometimes I wonder why you don't try to stick me for a commission."

"That wouldn't be legal," von Flanagan said absentmindedly. "Funny thing, it happening right here, isn't it?"

Malone agreed that it was a very funny thing.

"And right after we'd gone out, too," the big police officer said, musing. "And right after we'd been talking about Estapoole, and the rumor that he was coming to see you. Remember?"

Malone did remember.

"And he did come to see you, and he got murdered." Von Flanagan sighed.

"Small world," Malone said. "Good thing I was with you at the time it must have happened."

He smiled pleasantly.

"Oh," von Flanagan said, shocked, "I never would have suspected *you,* Malone. Never. The early newspapers may have had some wild kind of story, but it didn't mean a thing."

"Of course not," Malone said warmly.

"Funny thing, though, about the kid. Estapoole's step-kid, I mean. Nothing been said anywhere officially. Maybe the whole thing was just a rumor. But it was a pretty definite rumor she'd been snatched." He paused and waited expectantly.

Malone said nothing. He was reflecting that his night's work was only at its beginning.

"If she hadn't been snatched, and you hadn't been picked as a go-between," von Flanagan persisted, "then why would old man Estapoole be coming here to see you?"

Malone shook his head wearily. "Somebody," he said, "got some wires crossed someplace. Don't ask me."

Von Flanagan saw it wasn't going to do any good to ask Malone anything, finally said, "Well, I'll see you in court," and went out.

For just a moment, Malone let his head rest wearily on his hands.

"Malone," Maggie said, "I thought—" Her voice broke off. "You did have an appointment with him about the—child. For ten-thirty."

"I know," Malone said.

"This morning when I walked in and—saw him—I thought you—" Again her voice broke off. "I didn't know what to think. I stalled. I tried to reach you. Malone, I tried to call every place you might be. No luck. I was frantic. Then I finally had to give up and call the police."

"Remind me to give you a raise in pay," Malone said, trying to smile.

She sniffed. "Just remember to pay me, once in a while. And that reminds me, Malone—"

"Don't bother me with it now," he told her.

He sat silent for a while. For a few moments he considered telling her everything that had happened, beginning with his own discovering of the body. Then he decided against it. Maggie had worries enough of her own.

"And all the time I was worried half crazy," she scolded, "and the police and the newspapers and God knows who else trying to find you—and that poor little Marty Budlicek trying to find you—and Mrs. Estapoole—all that time, you were somewhere with some blonde."

He managed to grin at her. "Blonde," he said, "and with violet eyes. Did you say, 'Mrs. Estapoole?' "

"I did. And she's probably worried half crazy herself. After all, you were supposed to meet Leonard Estapoole here for one definite reason, remember?"

"You don't need to remind me," Malone said, wincing. He rose, put on his hat, and started for the door.

"At least," she said, with unexpected softness in her voice, "I hope you're going to go home and get some sleep."

"Eventually," he told her. "But I've got something to do first. I've got to unkidnap a child."

VIII

In the taxi on the way to Ma Blodgett's he tried to sort things out in his mind. Swiveleye McGinnis had done a fine, an outstanding job, and he admired it. Von Flanagan had taken it in enthusiastically. And Marty Budlicek's bit had helped, too. Now, the only problem was to find out what had really happened, and dig up the proof of it.

There was something he had overlooked, though, and it bothered him. Somewhere along the line there was some one detail, some one item, and he couldn't think what it was. It bothered him because he knew it was important.

He went over the whole thing again from its very beginning, from the telephone call from Leonard Estapoole making the appointment at his office. It was something important that had to do with the murder itself, and to save his life, he couldn't think what it was.

Then there was the matter of Tommy Storm. One of Hammond Estapoole's girls, Max Hook had said. Just how important a girl, he didn't know yet. But she'd known that Malone was going to be in some kind of a jam, and she'd gone along to lend a helping hand.

The question now was how she knew it, and how much more she knew.

Well, unless something unforeseen happened, he would be having a few casual words with Hammond Estapoole, any hour now. Furthermore, unless something downright earth-shaking intervened, he was going to have a lot more words with Tommy Storm, and they weren't all going to be casual ones. What was more, they weren't all going to be about murder, either.

Ma Blodgett looked tired and harassed. She also looked unmistakably relieved at the sight of Malone, and turned over to him an ominous silent Suzette without ceremony and without comment.

"Say thank you to the nice lady, for a very pleasant visit," Malone said.

Suzette made a definitely rude face.

"Go on, say it," Malone said, through clenched teeth. "I warn you—"

Something in the look on his face also warned her. She said, "Thank - you - for - a - very - pleasant - visit - goodbye." She stuck out her tongue, and climbed into the waiting taxicab. "Where are we going?"

"Maybe I won't tell," Malone said. "Because wherever we're going, you're going to say you don't like it." He leaned forward and told the driver, "Lake Forest. I'll look up the address when we get there."

"I don't want to go home," Suzette said.

"That's too bad," Malone said.

"I don't like it," Suzette said.

"That's too bad too," Malone said. "Is there anywhere you like?"

"No."

That seemed to take care of that subject. She sat in infuriated and brooding silence for a few dozen blocks.

"Why do I have to go home?"

"Because you're not kidnapped anymore," Malone said, "that's why."

She thought that over for a moment. "Did they pay a big ransom?" she asked hopefully.

"No," Malone said. "They didn't pay any ransom at all."

"Then I'm still kidnapped."

"No, you're not," Malone said. "You're going home."

"Why?"

"Because," Malone told her brutally, "the kidnappers don't want you any more, and Ma Blodgett doesn't want you any more, and I don't want you any more."

She took that in her stride, and said, "Well, anyway, my Mama still wants me."

"I suppose she does," Malone said. "There's no accounting for things like that."

She thought that over too, couldn't come up with an answer, and finally said, "I don't like you."

"That's good," Malone said. "That's fine. That simplifies everything. Now shut up."

She stayed shut up as far as Wilson Avenue. "If you won't take me home, I won't tell who kidnapped me."

"I don't care," Malone said airily. "Ma Blodgett didn't kidnap you, and I didn't kidnap you. We rescued you."

She sniffed again and said, "Don't be silly. I know that."

Malone looked at her thoughtfully, small and owl-eyed and cross-looking in the dim light. "Anyway," he hazarded, "I don't imagine you know who kidnapped you."

She made another very rude noise and said, "Of course I do."

The little lawyer's eyes narrowed. "Who was it?"

"I won't tell you," she said, "I don't like you."

"Go on," Malone said, "I don't believe you know."

The look on her face told him very plainly she wasn't going to walk into that kind of trap.

"In fact," she said a few blocks later, "I'm not going to tell anybody. Not even Mama."

"Don't then," he said, with great unconcern.

She didn't fall into that trap, either.

With the exception of a few minutes in a corner cigar store looking up the Estapoole Lake Forest address, he worked on her steadily, all the way from Howard Street to the massive gateposts that stood beside a wide, curving driveway.

He tried bribery, starting with ice-cream and working his way all the way up to cold, hard cash. She wasn't interested.

He appealed to her better nature, pointing out that kidnappers ought to be behind bars. That struck her as terribly funny, and Malone resisted a great urge to shake her.

He threatened her with great bodily harm, and she pointed out to him coldly that it was against the law to strike children.

And by that time, they had arrived.

He paid off the driver and stood for a moment looking at the Estapoole house. It was too dark to make out anything definite about its style, but there seemed to be a great deal of it, set among a lot of trees.

A rakish foreign car was parked in the driveway, where a man in a chauffeur's uniform stood polishing it. He stopped what he was doing, looked up, and started for Malone in a run.

"Hey, you!" he yelped, and dived at Malone.

Instinctively, Malone dived at the same minute, lowering his head and butting the chauffeur squarely in the stomach. The chauffeur grunted and sat down hard on the driveway. He started to get up again and was met with a hard right to the jaw. This time, he stayed put.

Suzette took Malone's hand and said, "I do like you."

"That," Malone said, brushing off his hand, "is tough."

A fat-faced butler, with eyes like two fried eggs, opened the door. He didn't seem particularly surprised or pleased to see Suzette, or Malone. In fact, he didn't look as though he would be particularly surprised or pleased at anything.

He ushered Malone impassively into an enormous room off the hall, and led Suzette toward another one. Left alone, Malone looked around him. It was a pleasant room, but with just a little more of everything than anybody would ever need. More chairs, more little tables with ashtrays, more lamps. There was a carved library table big enough to almost dwarf the enormous bouquet of hot-house flowers that stood on its exact center, and at one end of the room was a fireplace big enough to barbecue a steer.

It was a room that would have made the average person look and feel small, but when Carmena Estapoole came in, Suzette

clinging to her hand, she dominated it.

She was tall and graceful, and built like a sultan's dream. Her hair was very dark, and caught up loosely at her neck as though it might break loose and go streaming down her back at any moment. Her eyes were just as dark, and just slightly tilted at the corners, and with long, thick eyelashes. Her full lips were like cherries that have been left on the tree just a little too long.

Her rustling hostess coat was so deep a purple as to seem almost black, and fitted her invitingly. It seemed to Malone that she should have been holding a huge cornucopia overflowing with fruit.

"That's him," Suzette said. "He rescued me. He fought with people. He almost got killed. But he rescued me. His name is Malone. I like him."

There was a small hint of a smile at the corners of Carmena Estapoole's abundant mouth. "Thank you, Mr. Malone."

"Think nothing of it," Malone said. He begun unwrapping a cigar, wondering just what he wanted to say to her.

"Now, Suzette, you go to bed."

"No," Suzette said.

Carmena Estapoole said everything in one quick, silent look.

"Yes, Mama," Suzette said, with a look of pure adoration.

She gave her mother a good-night salute that almost undid the glowing black hair, advanced on Malone, and threw her arms around his neck. To his amazement, he kissed her back.

"I'm flattered," Malone said, after she had gone. "I have a feeling Suzette doesn't like everybody."

"So she says," Carmena Estapoole said placidly.

He looked at her admiringly. Within the past two days her only child had been kidnapped and then, without warning or advance notice, returned. Her husband had been murdered. But she remained as composed and unruffled as though yesterday had been just another day.

She said, "Hammond will be here in a moment." She sat down in a deep green chair near Malone's, took out a cigarette and fitted it expertly into a slender ivory holder. "I hope Suzette didn't give you any trouble."

"Not too much," Malone said. "We got along fine."

IX

Hammond Estapoole came in, a tall, solidly-built man who just missed being handsome. He greeted Malone cordially and said, "Hear you brought the baby back. Very nice going." He didn't say it as though Malone had done anything spectacular, or as if he had been particularly worried. He sat down beside

Carmena Estapoole, patted her hand, and assumed an air that was considerably more than protective.

Malone studied them thoughtfully. Hammond Estapoole was a good-natured, amiable man, the kind that was equally liked by men and by women, as well as by dogs, horses, old ladies and small children. Carmena was definitely the kind of woman to be adored, but not at a distance. Taken together, they made a very nice couple indeed.

He wondered if he ought to start in by saying that, according to every indication, and every popular plot, they had guiltily conspired to do away with the late Leonard Estapoole and to throw the blame on Malone.

He wondered if he ought to remark to Carmena that her probable sweetheart had a very cuddly blonde girl-friend by the name of Tommy Storm.

He wondered if he ought to offer something rather casual but conventional in the way of condolences.

Carmena Estapoole said unexpectedly, "I know you're thinking that I'm taking all this very calmly, Mr. Malone. But I'm a very calm person by nature. And you have no idea what it was like, being married to Leonard Estapoole."

"Frankly, I haven't," Malone said. He finally got his cigar lit. "Did he beat you?"

She smiled a little wearily. "I don't think he ever beat anybody in his life. Or could have. He was always exquisitely kind. I mean, sincerely, warmly, genuinely kind."

"But dull," Hammond Estapoole said. "I liked him, though."

"We will miss him," Carmena said, and the tone of her voice was more eloquent than a speech or a flood of tears would have been.

Malone waited patiently.

After a moment she said, "He was kind, he was generous, he was a thoroughly good, exasperating man. And he was tolerant. He was terribly, eternally, maddeningly tolerant."

"In his own family," Hammond put in.

Malone nodded. "I think I know what you mean. He wasn't exactly tolerant of graft, or of gambling houses and other nefarious establishments."

"Exactly," Carmena said. "He didn't drink, he didn't smoke. Hammond and I do. He not only didn't act as though he disapproved, but he made a great point of not disapproving. And Hammond gambles. But Leonard never said a word."

Malone considered remarking there were other pastimes Hammond engaged in besides gambling.

Hammond beat him to it by saying with a grin, "I likewise

chase women, or don't you read the gossip columns?"

Carmena and Hammond Estapoole exchanged a look of warm understanding which gave every indication that most of Hammond's chasing was devoted to one woman, and that Carmena not only knew of occasional side-trips but didn't object. Perhaps in her way, she too was tolerant. Again Malone wondered how, and when, to bring up the subject of Tommy Storm.

"Uncle Leonard just saw to it that I had plenty of money to spend recklessly and to lose foolishly," Hammond Estapoole said. "In the same way that there were cigar and cigarette boxes throughout the house, and an excellent cellar maintained. Which reminds me, Mr. Malone—"

"It would be very pleasant," Malone said.

A few minutes later he sipped his very fine Scotch, wished it were gin with a beer chaser, and said, "I can see how that much tolerance might, in time, become irritating." Though, he reflected, the recipient of the tolerance would have to be almost incredibly sensitive.

"I know what you're thinking," Carmena said, "but that's the way it was. Maddening. When cocktails were served before dinner, he would refuse very conspicuously. Not just once and for all time, but three hundred and sixty-five days a year. And when other people would accept, there was always that look on his face—that he didn't approve at all, but that he was saying nothing because he was tolerant."

"Or if I showed up with a broken pocketbook, five hours late for breakfast, and with a hangover that could be bottled and sold for fly-spray," Hammond said. "He would make it very obvious that he noticed it, and even more obvious that he wasn't saying a word."

Malone thought of the late Leonard Estapoole as he had occasionally seen him in life, of the lipless mouth, the thin nose that always seemed to be trying to locate a not too recently dead mouse, and the pale, gelid eyes. Yes, he could understand exactly how the solid citizen would do just that, deliberately make his tolerantly silent disapproval downright obnoxious. He wondered how a lively girl like Carmena could have married him in the first place.

She startled him by answering his thought. "I suppose you figure that I married him for his money," Carmena said. "I've got to admit, it helped. But I wasn't exactly poor. After all, I'd been married before."

And successfully, Malone remembered.

"It was really for Suzette," she said. "He was kind to her.

And I liked the idea of her growing up to be heiress to a real fortune, not just an adequate amount. She'd never have to go through some of the things I did."

Malone could understand that too. He nodded sympathetically and began to wonder if this pleasant, but aimless chatter was going to get them anywhere. Obviously it was up to him to make the first move.

"I'm sorry I roughed up your chauffeur a while back," he said. "But I recognized his voice, and I thought I owed him one for planting Suzette on me."

It was a shot in the dark, but he saw by their eyes that it had been a lucky one.

"Not," he went on, feeling his way hopefully, "that I wasn't pretty sure in my own mind anyway. The complete lack of publicity about the so-called kidnapping. The fact that neither of you seem to be particularly excited or upset. And Suzette's insistance on staying kidnapped —evidently she guessed what was going on, and figured she was helping her adored mother. But what was your reason?"

He'd expected to drop a bomb, and it was a total failure. It fell with all the loud reverberation of a feather lighting on a carpet. Carmena and Hammond looked at each other. Hammond laughed.

"I suspected you'd guessed," Carmena said. "Oh, well, no harm done. And what we did—what I did, really—probably isn't in the least bit illegal. Or is it?"

Malone shook his head reassuringly. "But why? And, why pick on me?"

"At the risk of ruining what's starting out as a very fine friendship," Hammond said, twirling his glass, "we picked on you because it would make the whole thing look authentic. Because of your reputation."

"What's the matter with my reputation?" Malone growled.

"Calm down," Hammond said. "Nothing's the matter with it. Except in the eyes of Uncle Leonard. He didn't seem to approve of your friends or clients. So he would naturally assume that you would be, or could be, approached by the kidnappers. In short, that you would be the ideal contact man."

"There was another reason," Carmena said, giving him a smile that turned his metabolism up a notch or two. "We knew we could trust you to handle things. And I knew you could be trusted with Suzette."

Malone said, "I suspect you could trust Suzette with a brace of wildcats. Especially if she didn't like them. But we're still not getting at the reason for the kidnapping."

"The papers," Hammond Estapoole said. "The list of names

and addresses of proved gambling houses. That was to have been the deal."

"I know that," Malone said. "Everybody seems to have known that. But why were you the one to get them?"

"Frankly," Hammond said, "I owed a lot of money. I still owe a lot of money—since I didn't succeed in getting the list. Much more than I wanted to ask Uncle Leonard for."

"I know who you owe it to," Malone said, "but don't mind that. As you said, this is the beginning of a very fine friendship. So Max suggested that you get that list, by the well-known fair or foul means, turn it over to him, and the little matter of the debt would be crossed off the books."

"That was it," Hammond said. "I thought it would be easy. The list, along with a lot of stuff about graft and pay-offs, and what-have-you, was all in an ordinary legal-size manila envelope. He stuck to it like scotch tape. I didn't have any more chance of lifting it than I have of lifting the Hope diamond. Less, probably. And there would have been considerably more hue and cry over it. To say nothing of his jumping to the conclusion that I had it."

"Leonard," Carmena added, "didn't altogether approve of Hammond's friends, either."

"Not without cause," Hammond said. "Anyway, that was the situation."

Carmena said, "In all fairness, I was the one who thought of the kidnapping angle. It seemed like a very sound idea. Nobody would be hurt. Hammond would get that list. Leonard would find something else that needed exposing to occupy his surplus energy. And Suzette would have the time of her life."

"Suzette," Malone told her, "informed me that she knew who the kidnapper was, but she wasn't going to tell anybody, ever."

"I'm not surprised," Hammond said. "Naturally, she'd recognize Tony and Joe. That's the chauffeur and his brother-in-law. But she's a loyal kid."

Malone agreed that Suzette was all of that, and more. "But suppose that Estapoole hadn't agreed?"

"I knew he would," Carmena said. "He did try to dicker. He offered money. He threatened to go to the police. He threatened the FBI. But in the end, of course, he gave in."

"Remarkable," Malone observed, "that anyone would think so much of a step-child."

"Oh," Carmena said, "quite frankly, he detested her. Some people do. But he would have done anything for me. And he knew what Suzette means to me."

She didn't need to enlarge on that. The smile she said it with

came all the way from the bottom of her heart.

Malone thought the whole thing over, and said, "I see the routine. You had the chauffeur and his brother-in-law snag Suzette. Leonard Estapoole was contacted. How?"

"We had to be careful," Hammond Estapoole said. "There were two letters sent to him, not registered or anything like that. The first one was to send him a little snip of Suzette's hair, so that he'd know that we—that the kidnappers, rather—really had her. The second one told him to call and make an appointment with you for ten-thirty last night, to keep the appointment, turn over the envelope to you, and then go home and wait for Suzette to be delivered."

"Well," Malone said, "he followed the first two of the instructions, anyway." He relit his cigar.

Hammond Estapoole nodded. "Later, Suzette was to be turned over to you, and you were to bring her home to her waiting family. That part of the arrangements went through as scheduled, too." He paused a moment. "But the rest of the negotiations were carried on by telephone."

"Who did the telephoning?" Malone asked. "Certainly he'd have recognized either of your voices."

Carmena and Hammond looked at each other. Hammond said, "A girl telephoned him."

Malone puffed furiously at his cigar and counted ten. Suddenly all the blood in his body seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere else. At last he said very casually, "Was it Tommy Storm?"

X

This time it worked—the look they exchanged was a startled one. Malone reflected happily that at least he'd been able to drop one very small bomb, hardly any bigger than a firecracker, but something.

"How do you know?" Hammond Estapoole asked.

The little lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "I get around," he said modestly. "I have a flock of trained little birds that tell me things. I have my sources."

"I trusted Tommy," Carmena said thoughtfully.

That told him a lot of things he wanted to know. The relationship between Tommy Storm and Hammond Estapoole evidently wasn't anything Carmena objected to, and Malone doubted that she would be that broad-minded where her personal property was concerned.

Tommy, then, had known about the fake kidnapping. She'd carried on the telephoned negotiations that had resulted in Leonard Estapoole's agreeing to turn over the envelope of explo-

sive information, in exchange for the safe return of Suzette Squires. But that would hardly have been enough to send her out to West Madison Street in what must have been, to her, the very small hours of the morning.

"Tommy didn't tell me a thing," he reassured them. "It was a guess on my part. I knew you'd been seen out with her a few times, and hers was the first name that came into my head." Well, that was practically the truth.

"Tony and Joe had no way of knowing anything had—gone wrong," Hammond Estapoole said. "They were to wait for you and turn the kid over to you, and they did."

There was a long, dull silence. Malone kept thinking about Tommy Storm.

"Now tell me," he said at last. "How many people knew that Leonard Estapoole was going to meet me, in my office, at ten-thirty last night?"

The pair looked unhappy. Finally Carmena said, "That's just it. Nobody did. Except we three—and Leonard. And the letter impressed on him that it had to be a very secret meeting, or the deal was off."

"Tony and Joe?" Malone asked.

"Neither of them," Hammond said. "They just did their part and didn't ask any questions. They probably knew that you were going to be the contact, but they couldn't have known when or where."

"There was a pretty solid rumor going around that—while nothing had been reported to the police—Suzette had been kidnapped, that Leonard Estapoole was going to pay off, and that I was to be the contact," Malone said.

Hammond Estapoole nodded. "That was to lend authenticity in case Uncle Leonard had any doubts. We knew it would get to him." He grinned wryly. "And I thought it would reassure Max Hook." His face sobered. "But nothing about when or where the meeting was going to take place."

"Tommy Storm?" Malone asked, trying to sound very unconcerned.

Hammond Estapoole shook his head. "Nobody knew until about six last night. That was when he got home and found the letter telling him to call you. Carmena and I knew because we'd written the letter, of course. But he didn't know until he got it, and you didn't know until he called you." He added, "There wasn't any way for Tommy Storm—or anyone—to know."

Malone looked very thoughtfully at his cigar. "Which leaves the two of you in a slightly difficult position."

"Why difficult?" Carmena asked, frowning. "The police found

the man who murdered Leonard. And he's confessed."

"The police have been known to be wrong," Malone said. "And confessions have been known to be repudiated."

Hammond said, "But surely—" and stopped.

Carmena said, "But I didn't. Hammond didn't. We didn't." She paused, took out another cigarette, fitted it into the long holder and lighted it, all very slowly and deliberately.

"All right, Mr. Malone," she said at last. "You ought to know this much. If this hadn't happened—there would have been a divorce. And in a decent interval Hammond and I would have been married. But this did happen. And we'll still be married. Again," she added, "after a decent interval, of course."

"Of course," Malone echoed.

"Hammond is a gambler," she said, stating a fact and not as though she were defending him, "but so am I. Only we gamble on different things. And as far as his"—and smiled—"women-chasing is concerned, you must realize that that was purely window-dressing."

Malone said, "Of course," again, and tried to say it with conviction. Oh, well, the future was Carmena's business and not his, and he had a hunch she could hold her own against a stage full of blondes.

"Nothing had been discussed with Leonard," Carmena said. "But I had no anxiety about the outcome. I know Leonard—knew him. He would have agreed, and there wouldn't have been any difficulty. And I wouldn't have felt too sorry. He had a great deal to interest him, besides me, and all of it very important."

"He also had a great deal of money," Malone pointed out, "and all of it is important too. This way, it's yours."

"I also have a great deal of money," Carmena said. She gave him another altogether delightful smile. "When we were married, Leonard established a very handsome trust fund for me. He did it, he said, because while he felt sure I was marrying him for his money, he wanted me to feel perfectly free."

Yes, Malone reflected, the late Leonard Estapoole would have done something and said something exactly like that.

"So you see," Hammond said, pouring more of the Scotch, "there simply isn't any possible motive."

No, Malone had to concede to himself, on the surface of things there appeared to be no motive at all. And he had a feeling that everything would turn out to be the same under the surface, no matter how deeply he dredged.

Against his better judgment, against his every personal instinct for survival, he felt pleased

about it. The situation was rendering his best theory a shambles and it was not only his best theory, but the only one he had. And still he felt pleased.

Carmena Estapoole was an extraordinarily beautiful woman, and an extraordinarily fascinating one. Just a little too much on the abundant side to be strictly his personal type, but he appreciated her. What was more, he liked her, which was even more important. He was sure, too, that she liked him.

As far as Hammond Estapoole was concerned, he knew and liked a hundred, two hundred of him. Charming, friendly, agreeable, not particularly ambitious, born, brought up and living on the fringe of great wealth, a suburbia of wealth, as it were. A little weak, perhaps, but never vicious, there wasn't harm in a carload of them. Their headquarters were luxury liners, Lakeshore Drive apartments, Lake Forest estates, always as permanent guests, and they turned up largely in night clubs, on polo fields and at gambling tables. In their way they contributed something at least to the color of the world, if not to its substance. Malone knew and liked a lot of them and he particularly liked Hammond Estapoole.

They made a handsome couple, and he hoped with all his heart that they would be a happy one, even if they had squashed his one and only theory flatter than last week's champagne.

Still, he wasn't going to appear to have given up quite so easily. "Just the same—" he began.

"And another thing," Hammond Estapoole interrupted. "Both Carmena and I were here all evening—all night. That's easily proved. Neither of us could have whipped off downtown and murdered poor old Uncle Leonard, even if we'd had any reason or inclination to. And even if this McGinnis fellow hadn't confessed."

Damn it, he wasn't going to let it go at that. "You're forgetting something," he said, a little coldly. "This McGinnis fellow, as you call him, could easily have been a hired killer. It fits the pattern perfectly."

"In that case," Hammond said, "wouldn't he have added that into his confession?"

"Not necessarily," Malone said. "As it stands now the story as he told it gives him a pretty solid case of self-defense. And if he gets away with it—or even if he gets away with a little matter of manslaughter—he can go on comfortably for the rest of his life, blackmailing whoever hired him." There, that ought to hold them for a while.

"Only, it didn't happen that way," Carmena said. "Maybe somebody did hire him, but it wasn't me, and it wasn't Ham-

mond. And there isn't anything at all, anywhere, to make it look as though we did."

"And on the other hand," Malone said, "there isn't anything, anywhere in the way of proof that you didn't. I'm sure you must realize that."

There was another long silence while they looked at each other. This time it was Malone who smiled first.

"This has all been very pleasant," he said, "but not very productive as far as I'm concerned. Oh, not your fault, at all. I just seem to have been shinning up the wrong bark." He wondered if he really meant that, and decided he didn't.

Carmena Estapoole lifted inquisitive eyebrows.

"You see," Malone told her, "just on the odd chance that McGinnis didn't murder your husband it's up to me to find out who did."

"Why not up to the police?" Hammond Estapoole wanted to know.

"The police are satisfied with what they've got," Malone said, "but McGinnis is my client."

Carmena said, "Oh," and frowned a little. Finally she said, "But if he didn't, why did he say that he did, and even go into all that elaborate detail, how, and why, and everything?"

"That," the little lawyer told her solemnly, "is going to be the question."

XI

Malone told himself that again, and even more solemnly, during the long ride back to the Loop. And now he had considerably less than forty-eight hours to answer it.

He got off the Northshore train and started walking through the warm spring night. Again the neon signs made artificial moonlight splashing on the sidewalks, again as he passed along Randolph Street strains of music came from here and there and everywhere. Later, he promised himself, later.

Everything would have been so simple if Carmena Estapoole, wife, and Hammond Estapoole, nephew, had conspired guiltily to do away with Leonard Estapoole, solid citizen.

And, of course, if he had been able to find a way to prove it.

Well, it did no good, especially at this stage of things, to cry over spilt motives. He paused for a moment at the door of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, and then went in. It wasn't so much that the late Leonard Estapoole's excellent Scotch was wearing off uncomfortably, as that he needed human companionship.

There was no one in the little bar save Joe the Angel himself, and a janitor from the city hall who sat staring silently into his beer as though it had hypnotized him. Malone slid onto a stool,

propped his elbows on the highly polished wood, and rested his head on his hands.

"Malone," Joe the Angel said. "You all right?"

Malone ordered gin with a beer chaser and nodded wearily. He supposed that all right was as good a name for what he was as anything.

"Last night," Joe the Angel said, "I worried. You are in a dangerous thing. You are the contact man for kidnappers. You come back here in a while with von Flanagan and I see everything is all right. So I no longer worry. Then in the morning I see the newspapers. The murder, in your office, and nobody knows where you are. They ask me where you are, and I do not know. Once more I worried. Then this afternoon I see the newspapers again. The murderer, this McGinnis, has been caught, and he has talked. Now you come in. And now I no longer worry any more, and this one is on the house, Malone."

"Thanks," Malone said, "and stick around. You can start worrying all over again pretty soon."

"Malone," Joe the Angel said in an anxious voice, "Malone, what happens now?"

The little lawyer shook his head. "I wish I knew," he said gloomily.

Joe the Angel wiped a purely imaginary speck off the bar. "I know about that Swiveleye McGinnis," he said gravely. "He would murder, yes. But he would not tell about it, not to the police, no. He would have five thousand friends to swear that he was a hundred miles away. He would never be around his apartment where the police could pick him up to ask questions. And even if he were caught, he never would answer any questions, not that McGinnis."

Malone sighed deeply and said nothing at all.

After a long silence Joe the Angel said, "Even if it had happened the way that he said it did, Malone. The way the newspapers say he said it happened. Almost like an accident. He would not have allowed himself to be questioned by the police. He would have gone a very long ways away."

Malone slowly and silently unwrapped a cigar.

"Tell me, Malone," Joe the Angel asked at last, "why did he do that, why did he say all that?"

Malone lit the cigar and went on saying nothing, very pointedly.

Joe the Angel shrugged his shoulders and located another imaginary speck on the bar.

Suddenly the city hall janitor drained his beer at a gulp, rose, walked to the door and paused there, one hand on the knob. "In my country," he said glumly,

"sometime's a man's voice is used to say what is not his at all. But in my country there are devils." He went out, closing the door entirely too quietly.

"In my country," Joe the Angel said, just as glumly, "the devil always gets the short end of the stick."

Malone sighed again, finished his drink, shook his head at Joe the Angel who was reaching for a refill, and rose to go. He had had all the human companionship he wanted for quite a while.

He felt weary, almost unbearably weary, and his bruises from the night before were beginning to ache again. He paused to examine his reflection in a store window, and winced. The small mouse under his eye had developed unpleasantly, his lip was still just a little swollen, and the day had done absolutely nothing for the condition of his clothes.

There would be a tub and hot water at his hotel. There would be a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed, there would be a newly pressed suit and a freshly laundered shirt waiting for him in the morning. And on the way to the hotel there would be a stop for a two-inch steak, french fried potatoes, and a slab of lemon pie. He realized not only that he hadn't slept much since the night before last, but that he hadn't eaten since breakfast.

And there were still some forty hours left of the forty-eight that had been given to him.

But instead he walked slowly, almost lamely, to his office. The relief night operator nodded to him, seemed about to enter into a discussion of all that had been going on, and changed his mind after one look at Malone's withdrawn and thoughtful face.

Alone in his office he flung his hat on the couch, sat down behind his desk, and stared moodily at nothing, which stared disinterestedly back at him.

From the very beginning he had been convinced—mistakenly, he now realized—that Carmena and Hammond Estapoole had either committed a murder or arranged it. Only, he told himself now, because that seemed to be the classic, the perfect solution. Aging and unlikable—to say nothing of unlovable—solid citizen with a vast amount of stocks and bonds and cash money. Young and beautiful and glamorful wife, already twice widowed. Poverty-stricken but handsome and highly attractive nephew.

Yes, it had been classic and perfect, and based, he reminded himself bitterly, on too much newspaper reading. Only it hadn't been correct, and on the strength of the conviction that had been based on a purely romantic notion, he had blithely arranged for Swiveleye McGinnis to allow himself to be framed

for murder, and had agreed to produce a better and provable suspect in a shockingly short length of time.

Now he was not only back where he'd started from, but considerably worse off than that. Swiveleye McGinnis and Max Hook, and ultimately the police, weren't at all interested in how his beautiful theory had been blasted to bits, they wanted him to produce another, and successful one.

He was back again at the point of, who wanted to murder the late Leonard Estapoole and frame John J. Malone for the murder.

He began thinking of possible and probable enemies who would fill both the qualifications, and gave up after a few minutes. The list he was making in his mind was getting entirely too long.

Besides, there was always the possibility, and a good one, that framing him for Estapoole's murder had been purely incidental and not included in the murderer's original plans. That seemed very likely, and made him feel a little better, but not much. The list was still a long one for the time he had at his disposal. The late Leonard Estapoole had made entirely too many enemies, even for a very long lifetime of working hard at it.

He looked unhappily at his desk. The little bronze Buddha was still missing, somewhere in the vastnesses of the police department, to eventually be tagged Exhibit A. He had never paid a great deal of attention to it, but now he missed it. It had always given him an amiable smile, and there had been a few occasions when he would have sworn that it winked at him.

Instead, he sat staring at the empty space where it had always been, and suddenly the idea came to him. He got up and prowled around the room restlessly, thinking it over. It was such a wild idea, such an incredible, impossible idea, that he knew it had to be right. Indeed, the more he thought about it, the more positive he grew.

Suddenly he picked up the telephone and called Tommy Storm. What time last night had she started being a helping hand, and where had the process led her?

Her voice was warmly alluring over the telephone. "I suppose you've already figured out how I knew—as much as I knew."

"I have indeed," he told her. "In fact, I was told about it. Unless you have something to add."

"I do, and I don't," Tommy said. "I knew about the phony kidnapping set-up and that you'd been picked to act as go-between. But I didn't know when or where it was going to be done—the deal, I mean. Except that it would be within the next twelve hours or so. So I took to follow-

ing Leonard Estapoole around. I thought he'd be easier to keep an eye on than you would."

"Thank you," Malone said, "and how right you were."

"It was about nine-thirty or ten when he went to your office. I parked the car and watched for him to come out. None of my business, but I was just curious. He didn't come out. I'd just about given up, when you came out, with that big police officer. Then I got really curious. The more so because there was no sign of Leonard Estapoole. So I decided to stick with you."

"Smart girl," Malone said admiringly. "So—?"

"So you and the cop went into Joe the Angel's. I waited. I thought you were never going to leave. I'd about decided to go in and join you in a drink, when along you came. I trailed along as far as your hotel and decided to give up. But you were practically dragged into a car with two men and a little girl, and I knew things were getting hot, so I stayed with the party. The two men dumped you and the little girl. Then you parked the little girl. I didn't know what to think."

"At that point," Malone said, "neither did I."

"You started up the street. I was trying to drive slow and keep out of sight. A man got out of a car parked down the street and took out after you. He slugged you, a couple of times. Before I could do anything about it, he'd hauled you into his car, and off he went. Again I stayed with the party. Finally he parked you at that flea-bag hotel. It looked as though you were going to stay put for a while, so I tagged along after him. Apparently he just went home and went to bed. It was about time, too."

"But this morning—" Malone said.

"I had to take back the car I'd borrowed. I wanted it back in the garage—it's a downtown apartment hotel garage—before the owner knew I'd borrowed it."

"Tsk-tsk," Malone said.

"Oh," she said, "I was sure Hammond wouldn't mind."

A nice, direct approach, Malone thought admiringly. In order to horn in on Hammond Estapoole's private kidnapping, she'd borrowed Hammond Estapoole's car.

"But I kept thinking about you," she said. "I got a cab and sat in an all night restaurant across West Madison Street from that Hotel, wondering whether or not I ought to investigate and see if you were still alive. I'd about made up my mind to go on in—at least find out if you were still there—when you came out, looking like the day after a political convention. I got another cab, and you know the rest."

"You were a busy little girl," Malone said warmly.

"I told you," she said, "I'm on your side. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"Yes," Malone said. "The guy who slugged me, and then parkme in the hotel. Would you recognize him if you saw him again?"

"I think I would," she said slowly. "It was dark, but—Malone!"

"I thought so," Malone said.

"And Malone! Another thing—"

"I thought that too," Malone said joyfully. "You wonderful, wonderful blonde angel, in a little while I'll ask you to tell the police that. And there will be a reward. At least a shiny red apple."

XII

Malone thought a while, then called von Flanagan. There were things, he said, that had to be discussed, all of them greatly to von Flanagan's benefit. And all to do with the murder of the late Leonard Estapoole.

Von Flanagan grumbled, pointed out that the murderer was already in jail and had made an acceptable confession, growled about the lateness of the hour, suspected irritably that Malone was going to perform something just to make life harder for him, and anyway he had a date with a poker game.

Malone pointed out that it was his duty as a police officer, that the drinks would be on him, and that they'd both go to the poker game later.

Von Flanagan agreed to meet him at Joe the Angel's as soon as he could get there.

Malone drew a long breath. He knew he wasn't wrong. There wasn't the faintest, remotest possibility that he could be wrong.

Joe the Angel looked up as he came in and his face turned a little brighter. "Malone," he said, "for some reason now, I don't worry."

"You never said a truer word," Malone said. He slid the cellophane wrapper off a cigar, aimed it at his reflection in the bar mirror, and hit a bulls'-eye.

Von Flanagan came in a moment later, said, "This had better be good." He sat down beside Malone.

"It is," Malone assured him, "and getting better all the time. We'll have a drink and be on our way, as soon as I ask you one question. Though I could answer it myself."

Von Flanagan looked suspicious, ordered rye, and said, "Where are we going, and what's the question?"

"To see Max Hook," Malone said. He signaled for gin with a beer chaser and went on, "First, I've a couple of things to tell you. I did have an appointment

with Leonard Estapoole at my office last night."

"I know that," von Flanagan growled.

"Of course you do," Malone said, "and you knew it last night. But until then, there were only two people in the world who knew it, outside of Leonard Estapoole and myself. I've made positive of that."

The big police officer adopted a *So What* expression.

"It's important," Malone told him. "Look. Leonard Estapoole called me and made that appointment himself. But he made it for ten-thirty."

"I knew that too," von Flanagan said. "And I don't see what's so important about it."

"I do," Malone said. "Because Leonard Estapoole got there early. Nearly an hour early."

Von Flanagan stared at him and said nothing.

"The important point is," Malone said, "that there's only one person who could have tipped you off that he was going to be there. Am I right?"

Von Flanagan nodded slowly. "Yes. It was Leonard Estapoole himself."

"Thought so," the little lawyer said triumphantly.

"He came to me instead of to somebody else," von Flanagan said very thoughtfully, "because he'd heard you and I had had our occasional run-ins. And he'd been told he could trust me. He told me why he was meeting you, and he planned to trip you up. He had it in for you. He was going to get there early, ahead of you—he said he could get in your office, any dime-store key would open it—and see if he could find any additional proof. Trace your direct contact with the kidnappers. And he wanted me in on the finish."

"I knew it," Malone said. "It had to be that way. Because there couldn't be any other way. Absolutely no one else knew he was going to be there, so it stands to reason the only person who could have tipped you off was himself. But here's the main point. Did you, accidentally or intentionally, tip off anyone else? That could mean a great deal?"

Von Flanagan shook his head firmly. "Not one soul. Scanlon and Klutchetsky didn't have any idea why we were going up to your office. I told them just what they told you last night, that if you were in I wanted to see you, if you weren't we were going bowling."

"Wonderful," Malone said. "Perfect. That clears up everything."

Von Flanagan looked at him anxiously. "Malone," he said unhappily, "it's true we've had our little disagreements."

"It is that," Malone said, "and all of that."

"And it's true that now and

then we've had our little troubles."

Malone said, "You're putting it very mildly, von Flanagan."

"But you know I'm the last one in the world to wish you any harm. I wouldn't be the one to see a man like Leonard Estapoole get you in a jam. You know that. If I went up to your office last night it was only for pure friendship—old friendship. I thought that in case you were in any trouble, I could get you out of it. You believe that, don't you?"

"In another minute," Malone said, "you'll have me in tears."

"Malone," von Flanagan said, very unhappily now, "you're not sore about it, are you?"

"Sore?" Malone said cheerfully, "Me, sore? Right now I couldn't be sore at anybody in this whole great big beautiful, wonderful world. Drink up, von Flanagan, and we'll be on our way."

Halfway to Max Hook's apartment, von Flanagan broke the silence with one question. "But Malone. Leonard Estapoole told me he was going to get there early. And when I got to your office at ten-thirty, he wasn't there."

"No," Malone said, "he wasn't there."

"But—Malone, he must have been there, and gone away again."

"Yes," Malone said, "he must have. And don't bother me. You'll have the whole story before long."

Von Flanagan sighed, and was silent.

If the elevator operator and bodyguard at Max Hook's building felt any surprise, he kept it discreetly to himself. Nor did Max Hook himself indicate that there was anything unusual in the occasion. He greeted them cordially, offered them chairs and cigars wrapped in tinted tinfoil, sent for the portable bar, and asked Malone a question with his eyebrows.

Malone said yes to everything, including the question.

"My good friend von Flanagan," he said, "is a man of great and broad understanding. So you can give him the paper I signed, that you're keeping for Swivel-eye McGinnis."

Max Hook shrugged his massive shoulders, grinned, took the paper from his desk drawer and handed it to von Flanagan.

The big police officer read it through twice while his broad face turned from its normal pink to crimson, to magenta, and almost to purple.

"Wait a minute," Malone said, "there's more. Leonard Estapoole did get to my office early, just as he told you he would. And he wasn't there when you got there at ten-thirty. Because he was out on the fire-escape, stone cold dead. Or dead, anyway. It hadn't been long. Not

more than a few minutes before I came in."

He went on to tell von Flanagan everything that had happened the night before, ending just where Tommy Storm entered the scene.

Von Flanagan stared at him steadily and angrily. "By all that's holy," he began ominously. "I've wanted to arrest you for twenty years, and this is the time I'm going to do it. And not just for obstructing justice, either."

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "You aren't going to arrest anybody. Because I haven't done anything. Oh, perhaps a little matter of moving a body without a permit. That's a minor offense, punishable with a fine. But you don't even have me for obstructing justice. Because I've been furthering it."

Von Flanagan stated exactly what he thought about Malone's furthering justice, and added a number of unpleasant details about what he thought of Malone.

"According to that paper," Malone said, pointing to it, "McGinnis was to stick to his story, and stay arrested for forty-eight hours—or until you had the murderer of Leonard Estapoole in jail."

"And I'm going to have," von Flanagan roared, "just as soon as I can get you down there."

"Calm down," Malone said, "you'll blow a fuse. You've already got the murderer of Leonard Estapoole in jail."

Both von Flanagan and Max Hook said *"McGinnis?"* in the same, incredulous breath.

"I know," Malone said. He put aside Max Hook's fine cigar and reached for one of his own. "The idea seemed impossible, it seemed preposterous, when I first thought of it. But it's the right answer, and I have proof. I can produce a witness who saw Swiveleye McGinnis go into that office building just after Leonard Estapoole, and come out a short time later. The same witness saw Swiveleye McGinnis trail me, catch up with me on a dark street, slug me, take me to a cheap hotel on West Madison Street and park me there so that I couldn't go back to my office and dispose of the body."

Von Flanagan said suspiciously, "I hope you're telling the truth."

Max Hook had wiped the surprise off his face and said nothing at all.

"This witness," Malone said, "followed McGinnis home. There isn't any doubt about it. And finally, if you really take his place apart, you'll probably find that envelope Leonard Estapoole had with him. It will be pasted under a table, or inside a picture, or some stupid, obvious place like that."

Max Hook made a strange, half-strangled little sound.

Malone avoided his eye and went on, "Estapoole had to have the papers with him. They never left his person. But they weren't on his person. Obviously, Swiveleye got what he was after."

Von Flanagan said, "I'll be blessed!" and then, "But how did you know?"

In the same instant Max Hook said, "But in that case, why did Swiveleye go ahead and agree to this put-up frame?"

"Because he couldn't imagine a safer way to prove himself innocent," Malone said. "He was picked because he was the type of guy who would do something like this particular murder and for this particular motive. Turns out that he did. And when he was approached, he figured that agreeing to it, and having that signed paper, would make him fool-proof safe."

Malone paused to light his cigar. "As far as how I knew it is concerned—it was because of the bronze Buddha." There was no point in letting them know that only an hour ago he'd been ready to give up and head for a country where there was no extradition.

Von Flanagan said, "What's this about the bronze Buddha?"

"On my desk," Malone told him. "Or rather, not on my desk. Not right now. And don't forget I want it back." He threw away his match and went on, "When I told Swiveleye McGinnis what to say, when he broke down and talked, I didn't mention the bronze Buddha. Just didn't think of it. I just said, 'Bashed him on the head,' if I remember correctly. And there are plenty of other heavy objects he could have said he used."

"I remember that," Max Hook said, nodding. "There wasn't any mention of any weapon."

"If Swiveleye McGinnis hadn't been the murderer," Malone said, "if he hadn't been there in my office, he'd have never known there was a bronze Buddha. But he had been there, and he had used it as a weapon. When he did his talking, he put it in."

Von Flanagan nodded very thoughtfully. "That's right. Why, there's even a picture of it in the paper." He was silent for a moment. "And I'll have a confidential word with your witness. The rest of it—" He indicated the paper. "The rest of it had better just be quietly forgotten. And there's no need to bring up the subject of the kidnapping. It never was official anyway. And we'll find that envelope of papers."

Malone cleared his throat. "One return favor, von Flanagan," he said softly. "After all, you said ours had been a long friendship. I hope it'll be a much longer one. All I want is five minutes alone with that envelope, when you get it."

Von Flanagan looked at him.

After all, a little more than pure friendship was involved. This wasn't the kind of story he would like to have get around.

"Sure thing," he said heartily. "Easiest little thing to arrange in the world."

Just a shadow of a smile crossed Max Hook's fat face.

"And now," Malone said happily, jingling the coins in his pockets. "What's all this about a poker game—"

MALONE leaned back in his chair and contemplated a world that was not only bright with spring weather, but with a lot of other pleasant things as well. The poker game had been one of his outstanding successes. The check from an appreciative Max Hook had likewise been outstanding. True, he had missed another night's sleep, but it was well worth it.

Maggie said from the door, "About that bracelet. Don't you think that a Paris negligee from Saks, or a big bottle of imported perfume, or four dozen roses—" She paused, hopefully.

"No," Malone said, "and see that it gets delivered this morning. Tommy Storm is a very remarkable girl."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "And Malone, Marty Budlicek wants to see you."

Marty Budlicek appeared in the doorway, smiling. Malone noticed a new suit, a new shirt and tie, a haircut, and a new gleam in his eye. "Malone, all day yesterday I wanted to tell you. When you telephoned me up at my brother's in Waukesha, I wanted to tell you. Last night here at the office I still wanted to tell you."

"All right," Malone said, "tell me now."

"That man," Marty Budlicek said, "that McGinnis. I wanted to tell you, when I read about the murder. I saw that man who was murdered, coming up. I saw that McGinnis coming up and going down again. I didn't know him, but they showed him to me at the police office, and I knew I had seen him. That's what I wanted to tell you, that I knew it all the time."

Malone was quiet for a moment. Then he rose, took Marty Budlicek's hand and shook it firmly.

"This, Budlicek," he said solemnly, "is a great occasion in my life. And you are entirely responsible for it. It's the first time in my life that I've ever actually bribed anybody—to tell the truth!"

the kidnapping of johnny waverly

by . . . Agatha Christie

It was the tiniest, eeriest dog in all the world. How could Poirot doubt its existence when crime's shadow followed it everywhere?

"YOU CAN understand the feelings of a mother," said Mrs. Waverly for perhaps the sixth time.

She looked appealingly at Poirot. My little friend, always sympathetic to motherhood in distress, gesticulated reassuringly.

"But yes, but yes. I comprehend perfectly. Have faith in Papa Poirot."

"The police—" began Mr. Waverly.

His wife waved the interruption aside.

"I won't have anything more to do with the police. We trusted to them and look what happened! But I'd heard so much of M. Poirot and the wonderful things he'd done, that I felt he might possibly be able to help us. A mother's feelings—"

Poirot hastily stemmed the reiteration with an eloquent gesture. Mrs. Waverly's emotion was obviously genuine, but it consorted strangely with her shrewd, rather hard type of countenance. When I heard later that she was the daughter of a prominent steel manufacturer of Birmingham

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With Agatha Christie's newest mystery novel, SO MANY STEPS TO DEATH *(Dodd, Mead) so conspicuously in the book-review headlines our tribute to her here might well consist in a simple nod of deep, pervasive gratefulness. For not only has the most brilliant of mystery writers constructively enriched every aspect of the modern detective story—she has consistently helped the* SAINT *live up to its slogan:* THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION.

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Originally published as THE ADVENTURE OF JOHNNY WAVERLY

who had worked his way up in the world from an office boy to his present eminence, I realized that she had inherited many of the paternal qualities.

Mr. Waverly was a big florid jovial looking man. He stood with his legs straddled wide apart and looked the type of the country squire.

"I suppose you know all about this business, M. Poirot?"

The question was almost superfluous. For some days past the paper had been full of the sensational kidnapping of little Johnnie Waverly, the three-year-old son and heir of Marcus Waverly, Esq., of Waverly Court, Surrey, one of the oldest families in England.

"The main facts I know, of course, but recount to me the whole story, Monsieur, I beg of you. And in detail if you please."

"Well, I suppose the beginning of the whole thing was about ten days ago when I got an anonymous letter—beastly things, anyway—that I couldn't make head or tail of. The writer had the impudence to demand that I should pay him twenty-five thousand pounds—twenty-five thousand pounds, M. Poirot! Failing my agreement, he threatened to kidnap Johnnie.

"Of course I threw the thing into the wastebasket without more ado. Thought it was some silly joke. Five days later I got another letter. 'Unless you pay, your son will be kidnapped on the twenty-ninth.' That was on the twenty-seventh. Ada was worried, but I couldn't bring myself to treat the matter seriously. Damn it all, we're in England. Nobody goes about kidnapping children and holding them up to ransom."

"It is not a common practice, certainly," said Poirot. "Proceed, Monsieur."

"Well, Ada gave me no peace, so—feeling a bit of a fool—I laid the matter before Scotland Yard. They didn't seem to take the thing very seriously—inclined to my view that it was some silly joke. On the twenty-eighth I got a third letter. 'You have not paid. Your son will be taken from you at Twelve o'clock noon to-morrown, the twenty-ninth. It will cost you fifty thousand pounds to recover him.'

"Up I drove to Scotland Yard again. This time they were more impressed. They inclined to the view that the letters were written by a lunatic, and that in all probability an attempt of some kind would be made at the hour stated. They assured me that they would take all due precautions. Inspector McNeil and a sufficient force would come down to Waverly on the morrow and take charge.

"I went home relieved in my mind. Yet we already had the feeling of being in a state of siege. I gave orders that no

stranger was to be admitted, and that no one was to leave the house. The evening passed off without any untoward incident, but on the following morning my wife was seriously unwell.

"Alarmed by her condition, I sent for Doctor Drakers. Her symptoms appeared to puzzle him. Whilst hesitating to suggest that she had been poisoned, I could see that was what was in his mind. There was no danger, he assured me, but it would be a day or two before she would be able to get about again. Returning to my own room, I was startled and amazed to find a note pinned to my pillow. It was in the same handwriting as the others and contained just three words: 'At twelve o'clock.'

"I admit, M. Poirot, that then I saw red! Someone in the house was in this—one of the servants. I had them all up, blackguarded them right and left. They never split on each other; it was Miss Collins, my wife's companion, who informed me that she had seen Johnnie's nurse slip down the drive early that morning. I taxed her with it, and she broke down. She had left the child with the nursery maid and stolen out to meet a friend of hers—a man! Pretty goings on!

"She denied having pinned the note to my pillow—she may have been speaking the truth, I don't know. I felt I couldn't take the risk of the child's own nurse being in the plot. One of the servants was implicated—of that I was sure. Finally I lost my temper and sacked the whole bunch, nurse and all. I gave them an hour to pack their boxes and get out of the house."

Mr. Waverly's red face was quite two shades redder as he remembered his just wrath.

"Was not that a little injudicious, Monsieur?" suggested Poirot. "For all you know, you might have been playing into the enemy's hands."

Mr. Waverly stared at him. "I don't see that. Send the whole lot packing, that was my idea. I wired to London for a fresh lot to be sent down that evening. In the meantime, there'd be only people I could trust in the house, my wife's secretary, Miss Collins, and Tredwell, the butler, who has been with me since I was a boy."

"And this Miss Collins, how long has she been with you?"

"Just a year," said Mrs. Waverly. "She has been invaluable to me as a secretary companion, and is also a very efficient housekeeper."

"The nurse?"

"She has been with me six months. She came to me with excellent references. All the same I never really liked her, although Johnnie was quite devoted to her."

"Still, I gather she had already left when the catastrophe oc-

curred. Perhaps, Monsieur Waverly, you will be so kind as to continue."

Mr. Waverly resumed his narrative.

"Inspector McNeil arrived about 10:30. The servants had all left by then. He declared himself quite satisfied with the internal arrangements. He had various men posted in the Park outside, guarding all the approaches to the house, and he assured me that if the whole thing were not a hoax, we should undoubtedly catch my mysterious correspondent.

"I had Johnnie with me, and he and I and the Inspector went together into a room we call the Council Chamber. The Inspector locked the door. There is a big grand-father clock there, and as the hands drew near to twelve I don't mind confessing that I was as nervous as a cat. There was a whirring sound, and the clock began to strike.

"I clutched Johnnie. I had a feeling a man might drop from the skies. The last stroke sounded, and as it did so, there was a great commotion outside—shouting and running. The Inspector flung up the window and a constable came running up.

" 'We've got him, sir,' he panted. 'He was sneaking up through the bushes. He's got a whole dope outfit on him.'

"We hurried out on the terrace where two constables were holding a ruffianly looking fellow in shabby clothes, who was twisting and turning in a vain endeavor to escape. One of the policemen held out an unrolled parcel which they had wrested from their captive. It contained a pad of cotton wool and a bottle of chloroform. It made my blood boil to see it.

"There was a note, too, addressed to me. I tore it open. It bore the following words: 'You should have paid up. To ransom your son will now cost you fifty thousand. In spite of all your precautions he has been abducted at twelve o'clock on the twenty-ninth as I said.'

"I gave a great laugh, the laugh of relief, but as I did so I heard the hum of a motor and a shout. I turned my head. Racing down the drive towards the South Lodge at a furious speed was a low, long grey car. It was the man who drove it who had shouted, but that was not what gave me a shock of horror. It was the sight of Johnnie's flaxen curls. The child was in the car beside him.

"The Inspector ripped out an oath.

" 'The child was here not a minute ago,' he cried. His eyes swept over us. We were all there, myself, Tredwell, Miss Collins. 'When did you see him last, Mr. Waverly?'

"I cast my mind back, trying to remember. When the con-

stable had called us, I had run out with the Inspector, forgetting all about Johnnie.

"And then there came a sound that startled us, the chiming of a church clock from the village. With an exclamation the Inspector pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock. With one common accord we ran to the Council Chamber, the clock there marked the hour as ten minutes past. Someone must have deliberately tampered with it, for I have never known it to gain or lose before. It is a perfect timekeeper."

Mr. Waverly paused. Poirot smiled to himself and straightened a little mat which the anxious father had pushed askew.

"A pleasing little problem, obscure and charming," murmured Poirot. "I will investigate it for you with pleasure. Truly it was planned *à merveille.*"

Mrs. Waverly looked at him reproachfully.

"But my boy," she wailed.

Poirot hastily composed his face and looked the picture of earnest sympathy again.

"He is safe, Madame, he is unharmed. Rest assured, these miscreants will take the greatest care of him. Is he not to them the turkey—no, the goose—that lays the golden eggs?"

"M. Poirot, I'm sure there's only one thing to be done—pay up. I was all against it at first—but now! A mother's feelings—"

"But we have interrupted Monsieur in his history," cried Poirot hastily.

"I expect you know the rest pretty well from the papers," said Mr. Waverly. "Of course, Inspector McNeil got on to the telephone immediately. A description of the car and the man was circulated all around, and it looked at first as though everything was going to turn out all right. A car, answering to the description, with a man and a small boy, had passed through various villages, apparently making for London.

"At one place they had stopped, and it was noticed that the child was crying and obviously afraid of his companion. When Inspector McNeil announced that the car had been stopped and the man and boy detained, I was almost ill with relief. You know the sequel. The boy was not Johnnie, and the man was an ardent motorist, fond of children, who had picked up a small child playing in the streets of Edenswell, a village about fifteen miles from us, and was kindly giving him a ride.

"Thanks to the cocksure blundering of the police, all traces have disappeared. Had they not persistently followed the wrong car, they might by now have found the boy."

"Calm yourself, Monsieur. The police are a brave and intelligent force of men. Their mis-

take was a very natural one. And altogether it was a clever scheme. As to the man they caught in the grounds, I understand that his defense has consisted all along of a persistent denial. He declares that the note and parcel were given to him to deliver at Waverly Court. The man who gave them to him handed him a ten shilling note and promised him another if it were delivered at exactly ten minutes to twelve. He was to approach the house through the grounds and knock at the side door."

"I don't believe a word of it," declared Mrs. Waverly hotly. "It's all a parcel of lies."

"*En verité,* it is a thin story," said Poirot reflectively. "But so far they have not shaken it. I understand also that he made a certain accusation?"

His glance interrogated Mr. Waverly. The latter got rather red again.

"The fellow had the impertinence to pretend that he recognized in Tredwell the man who gave him the parcel. 'Only the bloke has shaved off his moustache.' Tredwell, who was born on the estate!"

Poirot smiled a little at the country gentleman's indignation.

"Yet you yourself suspect an inmate of the house to have been accessory to the abduction."

"Yes, but not Tredwell."

"And you, Madame?" asked Poirot, suddenly turning to her.

"It could not have been Tredwell who gave this tramp the letter and parcel—if anybody ever did, which I don't believe—It was given to him at ten o'clock, he says. At ten o'clock, Tredwell was with my husband in the smoking room."

"Were you able to see the face of the man in the car, Monsieur? Did it resemble that of Tredwell in any way?"

"It was too far away for me to see his face."

"Has Tredwell a brother, do you know?"

"He had several, but they are all dead. The last one was killed in the war."

"I am not yet clear as to the grounds of Waverly Court. The car was heading for the South Lodge. Is there another entrance?"

"Yes, what we call the East Lodge. It can be seen from the other side of the house."

"It seems to me strange that nobody saw the car entering the grounds."

"There is a right of way through, and access to a small chapel. A good many cars pass through. The man must have stopped the car in a convenient place, and run up to the house just as the alarm was given and attention attracted elsewhere."

"Unless he was already inside the house," mused Poirot. "Is there any place where he could have hidden?"

"Well, we certainly didn't make a thorough search of the house beforehand. There seemed no need. I suppose he might have hidden himself somewhere, but who would have let him in?"

"We shall come to that later. One thing at a time—let us be methodical. There is no special hiding place in the house? Waverly Court is an old place, and there are sometimes 'Priests' Holes' as they call them."

"By Gad, there *is* a Priest's Hole. It opens from one of the panels in the hall."

"Near the Council Chamber?"

"Just outside the door."

"Voilá!"

"But nobody knows of its existence except my wife and myself."

"Tredwell?"

"Well—he might have heard of it."

"Miss Collins?"

"I have never mentioned it to her."

Poirot reflected for a minute.

"Well, Monsieur, the next thing is for me to come down to Waverly Court. If I arrive this afternoon, will it suit you?"

"Oh! as soon as possible, please, Monsieur Poirot," cried Mrs. Waverly. "Read this once more."

She thrust into his hands the last missive from the enemy which had reached the Waverlys that morning and which had sent her post haste to Poirot. It gave clever and explicit directions for the paying over of the money, and ended with a threat that the boy's life would pay for any treachery. It was clear that a love of money warred with the essential mother love of Mrs. Waverly, and that the latter was at last gaining the day.

Poirot detained Mrs. Waverly for a minute behind her husband.

"Madame, the truth, if you please. Do you share your husband's faith in the butler, Tredwell?"

"I have nothing against him, Monsieur Poirot, I cannot see how he can have been concerned in this, but—well, I have never liked him—never!"

"One other thing, Madame, can you give me the address of the child's nurse?"

"It is One-forty-nine Netherall Road, Hammersmith. You don't imagine—"

"Never do I imagine. Only—I employ the little grey cells. And sometimes, just sometimes, I have a little idea."

Poirot came back to me as the door closed.

"So Madame has never liked the butler. It is interesting, that, eh, Hastings?"

I refused to be drawn. Poirot has deceived me so often that I now go warily. There is always a catch somewhere.

After completing an elaborate outdoor toilet, we set off for

Netherall Road. We were fortunate enough to find Miss Jessie Withers at home. She was a pleasant-faced woman of thirty-five, capable and superior. I could not believe that she could be mixed up in the affair. She was bitterly resentful of the way she had been dismissed, but admitted that she had been in the wrong.

She was engaged to be married to a painter and decorator who happened to be in the neighborhood, and she had run out to meet him. The thing seemed natural enough. I could not quite understand Poirot. All his questions seemed to me quite irrelevant. They were concerned mainly with the daily routine of her life at Waverly Court. I was frankly bored, and glad when Poirot took his departure.

"Kidnapping is an easy job, *mon ami,*" he observed, as he hailed a taxi in the Hammersmith Road and ordered it to drive to Waterloo. "That child could have been abducted with the greatest ease any day for the last three years."

"I don't see that that advances us much," I remarked coldly.

"*Au contraire,* it advances us enormously, but enormously! If you must wear a tie pin, Hastings, at least let it be in the exact center of your tie. At present it is at least a sixteenth of an inch too much to the right."

Waverly Court was a fine old place and had recently been restored with taste and care. Mr. Waverly showed us the Council Chamber, the terrace and all the various spots connected with the case. Finally, at Poirot's request, he pressed a spring in the wall, a panel slid aside, and a short passage led us into the "Priest's Hole."

"You see," said Waverly. "There is nothing here."

The tiny room was bare enough, there was not even the mark of a footstep on the floor. I joined Poirot where he was bending attentively over a mark in the corner.

"What do you make of this, my friend?"

There were four imprints close together.

"A dog," I cried.

"A very small dog, Hastings."

"A pom."

"Smaller than a pom."

"A gryphon?" I suggested doubtfully.

"Smaller even than a gryphon. A species unknown to the Kennel Club."

I looked at him. His face was alight with excitement and satisfaction.

"I was right," he murmured. "I knew I was right. Come, Hastings."

As we stepped out into the hall and the panel closed behind us, a young lady came out of a door farther down the passage, Mr. Waverly presented her to us.

"Miss Collins, Monsieur Poirot."

Miss Collins was about thirty years of age, brisk and alert in manner. She had fair, rather dull hair, and wore pince-nez.

At Poirot's request, we passed into a small morning room and he questioned her closely as to the servants and particularly as to Tredwell. She admitted that she did not like the butler.

"He gives himself airs," she explained.

They then went into the question of the food eaten by Mrs. Waverly on the night of the twenty-eighth. Miss Collins declared that she had partaken of the same dishes upstairs in her sitting room and had felt no ill effects. As she was departing I nudged Poirot.

"The dog," I whispered.

"Ah! yes, the dog!" He smiled broadly. "Is there a dog kept here by any chance, Mademoiselle?"

"There are two retrievers in the kennels outside."

"No, I mean a small dog, a toy dog."

"No—nothing of the kind."

Poirot permitted her to depart. Then, pressing the bell, he remarked to me:

"She lies, that Mademoiselle Collins. Possibly I should also in her place. Now for the butler."

Tredwell was a dignified individual. He told his story with perfect aplomb, and it was essentially the same as that of Mr. Waverly. He admitted that he knew the secret of the Priest's Hole.

When he finally withdrew, pontifical to the last, I met Poirot's quizzical eyes.

"What do you make of it all, Hastings?"

"What do you?" I parried.

"How cautious you become. Never, never will the grey cells function unless you stimulate them. Ah! but I will not tease you! Let us make our deductions together. What points strike us specially as being difficult?"

"There is one thing that strikes me," I said. "Why did the man who kidnapped the child go out by the South Lodge instead of by the East Lodge where no one would see him?"

"That is a very good point, Hastings, an excellent one. I will match it with another. Why warn the Waverlys beforehand? Why not simply kidnap the child and hold him to ransom?"

"Because they hoped to get the money without being forced to action."

"Surely it was very unlikely that the money would be paid on a mere threat?"

"Also they wanted to focus attention on twelve o'clock, so that when the tramp man was seized, the other could emerge from his hiding place and get away with the child unnoticed."

"That does not alter the fact that they were making a thing difficult that was perfectly easy.

If they do not specify a time or date, nothing would be easier than to wait their chance, and carry off the child in a motor one day when he is out with his nurse."

"Ye-es," I admitted doubtfully.

"In fact, there is a deliberate playing of the farce! Now let us approach the question from another side. Everything goes to show that there was an accomplice inside the house. Point No. one, the mysterious poisoning of Mrs. Waverly. Point No. two, the letter pinned to the pillow. Point No. three, the putting on of the clock ten minutes—all inside jobs. And an additional fact that you may not have noticed. There was no dust in the Priest's Hole. It had been swept out with a broom.

"Now then, we have four people in the house. We can exclude the nurse, since she could not have swept out the Priest's Hole, though she could have attended to the other three points. Four people, Mr. and Mrs. Waverly, Tredwell, the butler, and Miss Collins. We will take Miss Collins first. We have nothing much against her, except that we know very little about her, that she is obviously an intelligent young woman and that she has only been here a year."

"She lied about the dog, you said," I reminded him.

"Ah! Yes, the dog," Poirot gave a peculiar smile. "Now let us pass to Tredwell. There are several suspicious facts against him. For one thing, the tramp declares that it was Tredwell who gave him the parcel in the village."

"But Tredwell can prove an alibi on that point."

"Even then, he could have poisoned Mrs. Waverly, pinned the note to the pillow, put on the clock and swept out the Priest's Hole. On the other hand, he has been born and bred in the service of the Waverlys. It seems unlikely in the last degree that he should connive at the abduction of the son of the house. It is not in the picture!"

"Well, then?"

"We must proceed logically —however absurd it may seem. We will briefly consider Mrs. Waverly. But she is rich, the money is hers. It is her money which has restored this impoverished estate. There would be no reason for her to kidnap her son and pay over her money to herself. Her husband, now, is in a different position. He has a rich wife. It is not the same thing as being rich himself—in fact I have a little idea that the lady is not very fond of parting with her money, except on a very good pretext. But Mr. Waverly, you can see at once, he is *bon viveur.*"

"Impossible," I spluttered.

"Not at all. Who sends away the servants? Mr. Waverly. He

can write the notes, drug his wife, put on the hands of the clock and establish an excellent alibi for his faithful retainer Tredwell. Tredwell has never liked Mrs. Waverly. He is devoted to his master, and is willing to obey his orders implicitly. There were three of them in it. Waverly, Tredwell, and some friend of Waverly. That is the mistake the police made, they made no further inquiries about the man who drove the grey car with the wrong child in it.

"He was the third man. He picks up a child in a village nearby, a boy with flaxen curls. He drives in through the East Lodge and passes out through the South Lodge just at the right moment, waving his hand and shouting. They cannot see his face or the number of the car, so obviously they cannot see the child's face either. Then he lays a false trail to London.

"In the meantime, Tredwell has done his part in arranging for the parcel and note to be delivered by a rough looking gentleman. His master can provide an alibi in the unlikely case of the man recognizing him, in spite of the false moustache he wore. As for Mr. Waverly, as soon as the hullabaloo occurs outside, and the Inspector rushes out, he quickly hides the child in the Priest's Hole, and follows him out. Later in the day, when the Inspector is gone and Miss Collins is out of the way, it will be easy enough to drive him off to some safe place in his own car."

"But what about the dog?" I asked. "And Miss Collins lying?"

"That was my little joke. I asked her if there were any toy dogs in the house, and she said no—but doubtless there are some—in the nursery! You see, Mr. Waverly placed some toys in the Priest's Hole to keep Johnnie amused and quiet."

"M. Poirot." Mr. Waverly entered the room. "Have you discovered anything? Have you any clue to where the boy has been taken?"

Poirot handed him a piece of paper.

"Here is the address."

"But this is a blank sheet."

"Because I am waiting for you to write it down for me."

"What the—" Mr. Waverly's face turned purple.

"I know everything, Monsieur. I give you twenty-four hours to return the boy. Your ingenuity will be equal to the task of explaining his reappearance. Otherwise, Mrs. Waverly will be informed of the exact sequence of events."

Mr. Waverly sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"He is with my old nurse, ten miles away. He is happy and well cared for."

"I have no doubt of that. If I did not believe you to be a good father at heart, I should not be willing to give you another chance."

"The scandal—"

"Exactly. Your name is an old and honored one. Do not jeopardize it again. Good evening, Mr. Waverly. Ah! by the way, one word of advice. Always sweep in the corners!"

We think THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *is a natural. Certainly there is no more beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than The Saint. And certainly there is no man more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a detective magazine than Leslie Charteris. For most of his adult life he has been a fantastically successful spinner of mystery stories and a keen student of crime fiction.*

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the dumb friend

by . . . Frank Bury

A crook who thinks his accomplice a moron may find that the Law can rejoice in the antics of a fool.

"WE'LL NEVER make it to the Bayport, Slick," Hal McCurtin said, "no matter how much you step on it."

The man at the wheel muttered, "Shut up," through tight lips.

"They'll be waiting to pick us up at Huntington," Hal muttered. "The guy who was with that truck-driver got our license number. They'll put out a call."

"Who's to blame for that?" Slick demanded angrily. "You just didn't use your head. I told you to take care of the other guy."

"Okay, okay, so it went wrong," Hal said sulkily. "I thought you was having trouble with the driver. Otherwise I wouldn't have butted in."

"I told you to look after the other guy," Slick snapped. "Him alone. But no, you had to get crazy ideas, like you always do."

Hal's eyes—too small for his fat, flabby face—were full of fear. They had been fixed on the road ahead, but now they wavered in alarm. It was dusk, and he could not determine with certainty whether the car in the

No two partners in crime can ever have precisely the same measure of intelligence. And in the difference between them—not only in intelligence, but in instinctive animal cunning—may reside the kernel of a psychologically fascinating mystery story. Frank Bury has set that kernel ironically aglow..

distance was a police car or not. His lips quivered as he looked sideways at the face of the man at the wheel—a hatchet face that evoked terror because of its unsmiling cruelty.

"What are you going to do—drive straight into a road block?" Hal demanded. His voice was high-pitched and edged with terror.

"If I do, I'll talk my way out of it," Slick said.

"If they don't get us at Huntington, they'll be waiting at the Bayport, Slick. You'll never go aboard Joe's boat."

"Let me do the worrying, damn you!" Slick's voice rang out like a pistol shot, and Hal cringed.

"I was only warning you."

Slick swung the wheel, and the car shot off the road at a signboard which said "Esso—Pabst's Blue Ribbon—Sandwiches." The car shot past the filling station in the gathering dusk, and drove to the small parking lot behind it. Slick braked in the shadow of some trees.

"You're not saying anything to Sally?" Hal said, grabbing Slick's arm. "I don't trust that two-faced dame."

Slick wrenched his arm away. "I'll decide about that. For a guy with a brain the size of a horse-chestnut, you've got plenty to say!"

"I ain't going in with you," Hal said. "I'm not showing my face to Sally or anyone else."

Slick gave him a withering look. "Stay here then. I don't want you with me, anyway." He walked away from the car, and around to the front door of the filling station's restaurant annex—a ten-by-twenty wooden shack.

Sally looked up in surprise as he came in. "Why, Slick! This sure is unexpected!"

"Yeah, unexpected for me, too." Slick said. "I may have to keep my car out in back all night. Is that okay?"

She paused in the act of filling a cup from the coffee percolator. "Sure, I guess so, Slick. Only—I'm expecting Rick Robson."

"Robson? Is that the guy who owns this shack?"

Sally nodded. "He'll be here any minute." She handed Slick a cup of coffee. He sipped it thoughtfully.

"He comes in a car doesn't he?" Slick asked.

"That's right," Sally said. "Why?"

"Nothing," Slick said. "I was just testing my memory. His car was a Chevy wasn't it? Blue?"

"It still is," Sally told him.

"Mine's a Chevy, too," Slick said. "Fawn. Quite a coincidence, eh?" He was watching her wiping the coffee percolator and cleaning up the counter in preparation for the boss's arrival. "There's no need to tell him I'm

keeping the car behind the shack," he added.

She looked at him quickly. "I don't want to get in any trouble," she said. "I hope you're not in trouble, Slick—with the cops or anything."

Slick lit a cigarette calmly. "Anyone ever tell you that you looked like Jane Russell?" he asked.

"Who, me?" Sally said, and giggled.

The door opened and a stocky, businesslike man came in. He nodded briefly at Slick and went behind the counter.

"Evening, Sally," was his curt greeting. "Been busy?"

She shrugged and said, "So-so, Mr. Robson."

"Are these bills?" Robson asked. He sat at a table behind the counter, and took out his glasses. Sally grimaced, and winked at Slick. He winked back.

Slick sat for ten minutes, thinking, staring worriedly through the smoke. Finally he got up. Robson was still at the table writing. Slick put a quarter on the counter and jerked his head towards the door. Sally nodded. He went outside.

Darkness had descended on the parking lot. Slick could hardly see the car under the trees and when he got up to the car, Hal was not there. He permitted himself a smile of satisfaction. If Hal had become panicky and decided to go it alone, so much the better. The stupid fool was a liability anyway.

For an instant a smile flickered across his customarily unsmiling face. Then, abruptly, it was gone.

Hal would still ask for his cut. He was stupid and he was yellow, but he always showed up to demand his share. Slick turned quickly at the sound of footsteps. Some sixth-sense warned him it was Hal coming back.

And now he knew that he didn't need Hal any more.

Slick felt around on the floor at the back of the car. With savage purposefulness his hand closed over an iron bar. What had happened to the truck driver could also happen to Hal, with less trouble.

Hal fell face downwards in the long grass. Slick threw away the iron bar and flicked on a pocket flash. The fat little moron was breathing all right. There was some blood on the back of his head.

Twenty yards away stood the Chevrolet belonging to Robson. Sally's boss was still inside. Slick ran across to Robson's car and jumped in. The ignition-key was there all right. He started the car up and swung it out to the road. He did not even glance back.

If Robson was slow about reporting the theft of the car he might get to the Bayport without being picked up. Once he

got to Joe's boat he would be all right. The needle of the Chevy crept up to 50.

The police stopped him at Huntington, just as Hal had said they might. But he was not worried. He was quite sure they could not have received the number of Robson's car yet.

Slick smiled at the state trooper. "Anything wrong, officer?"

"Come on, get out," the trooper said tersely.

Another police officer said: "The guy on the truck got the color wrong. This car is blue, not fawn. But the license number checks—five seven nine two."

"That's not the number of this car," Slick said.

"Oh, no?" retorted the police officer.

Slick sprang from the car. Four strong arms grabbed him, but not before he had turned his sickened eyes on the back of Robson's car.

If he had not slugged Hal so soon, Hal would have told him what he had been doing out there in the dark.

It was the worst of bad breaks.

The fat moron hadn't thought about stealing the other guy's car. The crazy, stupid fool had only thought of switching the number-plates.

JOHNNY ONE-EYE

By DAMON RUNYON

It was a tiny furry ball of a kitten only a few weeks old. But to a fugitive from justice in an empty house a cat with big wondering eyes can listen to a tale of murder, violence and high-voltage suspense with at least an outward show of attention. But the inner glow of reading pleasure excitement, the shudders and chills and terrors of the mind which mystery lovers so keenly treasure would hardly come within the province of a kitten. And that's why we strongly urge you not to miss this story by the one and only Damon Runyon, story teller extraordinary, in our very next issue.

the murder trap

by . . . William MacHarg

The crime seemed to be encased in cement. But O'Malley had the wit to blend keen deduction and fast action in a 90-proof solvent.

"HERE'S ONE with a stone wall around it," O'Malley said. "A young fellow named Mr. Commings came home from a weekend in the country and found a murdered guy in his apartment. Papers in the dead guy's pockets showed he was named Mercin, and him and a guy named Armid had a decorating business. Cops got this Armid and he identified the dead guy as Mercin all right. Right after that they located Mercin's wife and she identified him too."

"What does Armid say about it?" I asked.

"He claims it's an extortion killing. Him and Mrs. Mercin say Mercin went out in the evening and didn't come home. Then Armid got a phone call to pay five thousand dollars if he wanted his partner back. Their statement is they paid it. The next thing him and Mrs. Mercin knew, cops called 'em and said Mercin had been knocked off."

"What does Commings say?"

"He claims he never seen the dead guy until he opened his apartment door."

Plainly there is a gratifyingly large number of readers who can agree on the round-the-clock merits of William MacHarg's Officer O'Malley. It can hardly be denied that even the most ordinary of crimes would take on a fascinating perspective if seen through the eyes of so appealing a sleuth. But the crimes which O'Malley is called upon to solve are the opposite of ordinary, as this free-swinging, hard-hitting mystery so dramatically attests.

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"What's your opinion of the case?" I asked.

"Boy! I don't think nobody is right about it."

We looked at the dead man. Even in death he appeared neat, well kept and precise—a man in his late fifties. There were blue marks on his throat which showed he'd been strangled.

"Well," O'Malley observed, "I suppose we've got to go to the trouble of talking to the people who are tied in the closest to it."

The decorating establishment was just off Park Avenue and was rather pretentious. A handsome young man whose name proved to be Roberts was disappointed when he found we weren't customers. Armid was in an inner office. He was in his middle forties, dapper, carefully groomed, and somewhat supercilious. A quite beautiful young woman who was with him turned out to be Mrs. Mercin.

"What's this extortion story?" O'Malley asked them.

"Why," Armid replied, "Saturday morning I got a phone call here in the office. It was a man's voice."

"Did you recognize the guy's voice?"

"I didn't. Just before that, Mrs. Mercin had called up and said that Mercin hadn't come home, and that she was seriously worried. The voice said they had Mercin and, if we wanted him back, to go to the bank and get five thousand dollars. I phoned Mrs. Mercin and she came down here and we talked it over. Then I went to the bank and got the money.

"We usually close on Saturday afternoons. But I waited here because the voice had made it plain there would be a second phone call. It didn't come until early Sunday morning. The same voice asked if I had the money. It instructed me to wrap the money in a newspaper and go in my car at exactly half past four in the morning and drop the package in a certain refuse basket on Tenth Avenue. Then I was to keep on driving and not look back. I was very careful not to depart from the instructions in any way. Then we waited, but we didn't hear anything until Sunday evening when the police told us Mercin was dead."

"What refuse basket?" O'Malley wanted to know.

He told us.

"Where was your husband going when he went out that Friday evening?" O'Malley asked Mrs. Mercin.

"I don't know," she replied. "It was between nine and ten o'clock. I had a headache and had gone to bed. I heard him leave and I assumed he was just going to the corner. He sometimes goes out to buy a morning paper."

"Yeah? What happened before that?"

"Nothing unusual. I'd picked him up here at the store a little after six. We had dinner at home."

"He didn't receive no message or send one to somebody after you met him?" asked O'Malley. "Think hard now."

"No. The telephone wasn't used except just before dinner when I phoned the garage to send someone to come and get the car."

"You don't know of no message Mercin got neither?" O'Malley inquired of Armid.

"I don't."

"Rather peculiar, O'Malley," I remarked, when we had left them, "the manner Armid claims to have paid the ransom by dropping it in a refuse basket."

"Why, it's been done that way. A guy would be watching."

We went and saw Commings. They had him locked up. He was a sleek-seeming man in his early thirties. We didn't learn anything more than the police had got already. Commings had spent the week-end on Long Island. He came home Sunday evening. Having a couple of bags with him, he stopped at the garage where he kept his car and picked up a man to take the car back for him. O'Malley asked the man's name, and wrote it down. It was Joe Biggers. Unlocking his apartment, Commings discovered the dead man. Then he phoned the police.

"How come you was away over the week-end?" O'Malley asked him.

"I'm always away over the week-ends."

"Yeah? So when you're away who do you leave your key with?"

"Nobody ever has my key?"

We talked with Joe Biggers. He was at the garage—a young man, blond and rather gigantic. He couldn't tell us anything. He'd driven away with the car before Commings went in.

"He seems honest," I said.

We saw the apartment. A cop was on duty there.

Commings had a front apartment on the first floor, the first door past the entrance. Mercin had been killed in his small living room. I saw no sign of a struggle. There was a child's toy there—a small woolly bear—and O'Malley examined it.

"What's the bear?" he asked the cop.

"It was here when I come."

"This look like an extortion killing to you?" O'Malley inquired of me.

"It doesn't look like anything else," I replied, "and in my opinion the police are wise in holding Commings."

"Yeah? If he was in on it, why did he call the cops?"

"A criminal," I said, "always thinks he's smarter than anybody else, and Commings may have thought that by calling the police

he would establish his innocence."

"You're nuts!"

I met O'Malley next evening.

"How goes it?" I asked him.

"You was right about one thing," he told me. "This Commings is broke. We found out about Mercin, too. He was a philanthropic kind of guy. He made plenty of money, and he gave parties for poor children. Sometimes he'd get his pockets all full of dimes and walk through poor neighborhoods and give every kid a dime.

"Well, Armid ain't that way. He keeps a tight hold on his money. He got that five thousand from the bank all right. Mrs. Mercin worked in that decorating place—until she got married to Mercin. It ain't true what Commings said—that nobody but him had a key to his place. Since the guy has been broke a maid comes in twice a week and cleans up his apartment. The days when she does that he leaves a key with the janitor."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"A few things. The medical office says Mercin got knocked off that same Friday night when he disappeared. It seems he hadn't never learned to drive a car. His wife done the driving. It turns out him and Commings kept their cars at that same big garage."

I was excited. "There's your contact," I told him. "Commings could have learned all about Mercin at the garage. There can't be no doubt of it."

"Well, *I* doubt it!"

I couldn't find O'Malley for more than three days. Then I encountered him coming out of headquarters.

"You're on time," he announced to me.

He had a police car and we drove to the East Side. A plainclothes cop was on a street corner, but we didn't speak to him. We passed a tall building.

"Mercin's place is in there," O'Malley informed me.

A block and a half beyond we came to a drugstore. Two plainclothes men in the drugstore were buying a woolly bear like the one I'd seen at Commings' apartment.

"How is it?" O'Malley asked them.

"Looks to be going all right."

We drove to the West Side, parked the car and walked a block around a corner. Three flights of narrow stairs led us past rooms over a store. O'Malley unlocked one of the rooms, but I couldn't tell much about it except that it was a cheap room, and a man lived there, and even the furniture had been pulled all to pieces.

It became night and people went up and down the stairs. We waited six hours. Then a knock came at the door and O'Malley

opened it. Mrs. Mercin stood on the threshold. When she saw us, her face became chalk and her eyes stared and grew blank.

"Well, O'Malley," I said, when we had her in the police car.

"Wait a while," he advised me.

I waited. At the precinct house they took her into the detectives' room and I went along with them. The place was full of cops. I saw on a table a lot of loose keys, and money which I thought might be five thousand dollars, and a little black book, and two woolly bears. Then the inspector in charge had me put out of there. So I waited again.

"Certainly, O'Malley," I said, when he finally came out to me, "Mrs. Mercin didn't kill her husband."

"Biggers killed him," he said.

"In conspiracy with Commings?"

"Don't you never give up an idea? Commings had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Mercin worked at that decorating place and she got married to Mercin. She wouldn't have married him except for his money. When she quit working, that guy Roberts came and took her job in the decorating business, and Mrs. Mercin fell in love with him. They had been seeing each other right along without Mercin or Armid ever suspecting.

"Mercin gave away a lot of money, but he always lived simply and he didn't see no reason why his wife should spend more money than he did. Mrs. Mercin is the kind of woman that wants what she wants, but ain't willing to give up nothing she's got. She wanted Mercin's money and his share of the business, and if Mercin divorced her she wouldn't get those, and she wanted to get married to Roberts. So, after a while, the idea come to her to knock off her husband."

"Just like that!" I remarked. "So Roberts was in on it."

"He didn't ever even know about it. Mrs. Mercin is smart. She didn't figure to marry no guy that knew she had done murder. So Biggers come into it. I figure it this way: Biggers is a good-looking blond guy and fond of the ladies, and the story is he made a play sometimes for ladies that kept cars at the garage. Mrs. Mercin picked him up sometimes to take back the car, and it's my idea he maybe made a pass at her.

"Well, Mrs. Mercin wasn't interested in nothing like that. But she *was* looking for somebody to knock off her husband, and that give her a chance to sound Biggers out. The end was, it proved, Biggers would do murder for five thousand dollars."

"I don't get it," I said.

"You will. With Mercin and Armid being the kind of guys they were, Mrs. Mercin couldn't

get hold of that much dough, without arousing suspicion. So her and Biggers worked out that kidnap racket."

"I see!"

"Sure. Mrs. Mercin knew that, with her urging him, Armid would pay the five thousand if he thought Mercin was kidnapped. The night Mercin got knocked off, Biggers called up and Mrs. Mercin was waiting to answer. After she'd hung up, she told Mercin that Biggers had phoned her his kid looked like it was dying and he didn't have no money for medicine or a doctor. Of course Biggers didn't have no kid, or no wife. But Mercin didn't know that. She knew what he'd do under them circumstances. He'd go to give help. She'd already fixed it so he wouldn't expect her to go with him, by getting undressed and saying she had a headache. She gave him Commings' address, claiming Biggers had given it to her over the phone."

"But—" I objected.

"Say! Wait. Well, Mercin went there and Biggers was waiting. If Mercin thought maybe that was too good an apartment for a guy without money, he didn't get suspicious until it was too late. As soon as Biggers shut the door behind the old man, he hooked his arm under his chin and strangled him. The next day he phoned Armid and Sunday morning he collected the dough."

"Explain," I then demanded, "about Commings' apartment."

"Yeah, that part is something! What Mrs. Mercin and Biggers had to have was some place where the dead guy wouldn't be found till Biggers had got the five thousand. Well, Biggers knew how to do that. Guys have hobbies and Biggers' hobby is keys. We run into crooks sometimes that have that for a hobby. It's easy to figure why.

"Biggers said in his confession, if he could unlock something somebody locked up, it made him feel superior. He comes from upstate, where he worked in garages. He began making car keys. When people left their car at the garage, they left the keys with it. Biggers always had in his pocket wax, or soft putty, and he could take a print of any key and make a key exactly like it. Well, cars got stolen when away from the garage—Biggers didn't steal 'em; he furnished the keys—and people got suspicious. So he left upstate and came to New York."

"You mean he made a key to Comming's apartment?"

"He already had one. Commings remembers now he one time dropped his door key and another key in a holder in his car when he left it at the garage. He got 'em back through the garage office, but already Biggers had got a print of 'em. He'd tried out the key when Com-

mings was away and he knew it would work.

"Commings ain't the only one. Whenever Biggers could get hold of a key, he made a key like it—and each key was numbered. He had a little book and kept a record of what each key belonged to. It's my idea, when he decided to quit his job at the garage, there'd have been some nice burglaries. But murder looked better to him. He knew Commings went out of town every Friday and stayed over the week-end."

"But," I said, "how did you solve it?"

"Why, there had to be some connection between Mercin and Commings and there wasn't but one. They used the same garage. It's a big garage and several guys work there, so we lookd 'em all up. The most suspicious was Biggers, but we wasn't sure it was him."

"Did you suspect Mrs. Mercin?"

"After I seen the toy bear I suspected her. She claimed her husband went out and didn't say where he was going. Well, he went to the corner. There was bears in the window and he thought he was going to see a sick kid, so he went in and bought one. The drug clerk remembered.

"Mercin was taking a bus and he had seen the bus coming, so he didn't wait for the bear to be wrapped up. When Biggers knocked the guy off, he looked in his pockets, the way Mrs. Mercin had told him. He found Commings' address that she had wrote down for him, and he took that and destroyed it. He didn't think nothing about the toy bear.

"I asked myself this: 'Would a guy be going somewhere where he'd take a toy bear with him and not tell his wife?' I didn't think so. It looked like a murder 'plant' to me. To find out if it was, we worked an old gag on 'em."

"I know," I said. "You mean the cops with their badges?"

"That's it. First we pinched Biggers, but we didn't tell nobody. It wasn't in the newspapers. We found keys at his place and tools for him to make 'em, and in an upholstered chair we found the five thousand bucks. Then we put cops to watch all them people, making sure by the badges they knew they was cops. Roberts didn't pay no attention, and Armid asked the cops what the idea was. Mrs. Mercin said nothing. Wherever she went she saw a cop near her, and the woman just worried.

"When you and I went to Biggers' place and waited, she was ready to break."

"Clever work!" I declared.

"You tell the inspector. How he looks at it now, the only way they got caught they was dumber than we was."

knows all: tells all

by . . . Horatio Winslow

When Chet wed Elma he started walking a straight line. But a straight line may dip and curve alarmingly—on Murder Highway.

THAT MORNING, while the Princess Luxor waited for Joe Downey, her heart was with Chet. A cynic would have laughed and whispered and gone on whispering that it was silly for a woman of that age to love anybody like Chet Furniss. But the heart goes on its own sweet way and she'd given Chet all of her love and all of her hopes for the future—gifts which an ardent heart can't take back at will.

She had finished a final tidying-up of the "studio." The crystal ball had been polished and the big frame, with its photographs of the palms of the famous, wiped clean. Even the very bad oil portrait of herself had been set very expertly and precisely at right angles with the moulding.

She was grateful that the artist, an impecunious client, had been kind to her face. The portrait didn't suggest a woman who had passed her fifty-fifth birthday and who weighed a hundred and eighty-seven pounds. She herself

A new Horatio Winslow story is always an event, for Mr. Winslow is one of the most original and versatile writers in the field of contemporary fiction. Perhaps that is why the "smooth-paper" publications have given him top billing for so many years. Closely allied to his superb craftsmanship is his genius for exposing the wickedness of minds warped by a deadly interplay of greed and malice, in an atmosphere reminiscent of pale hothouse blooms opening their malformed petals on a red dawn of human violence.

had devised the portrait's title: "Princess Luxor: Knows All—Tells All."

Today, even the slight exertion of dusting the studio had been too much for the Princess. She had eased her burdensome avoirdupois into the big easy chair on one side of the table, and had let her hands drop limply by her sides.

One minute past ten and Joe said he'd be here at ten sharp, she thought. *I've got to convince him about Chet and I don't know how to begin.*

It was difficult to imagine the Princess as tragically—or even lightly—involved in a passionate love affair. Her big, kindly face was that of a woman who derived the most intense satisfaction from treating the small fry of the neighborhood to jelly sandwiches and dimes, which, indeed she did. In only one outward aspect did she differ markedly from the Aunt Sarahs of this world. Her hair had suffered from a too successful application of Dr. Sennbury's Eureka Tinto Number Nine — guaranteed Golden Blonde.

As the door into the waiting room on the other side of the studio scraped open, the Princess straightened, listening intently to the resolute, familiar footsteps of a man who knew where he was going. Her face brightened.

"Come on in, Joe. There's nobody here but just us chickens."

It was Joe Downey right enough, with his closely-cropped gray hair, square face, and strong, heavy shoulders. He sat down across the table from the Princess while his eyes studied her shrewdly.

"Do you realize it's been nearly two months since I've seen you, Elma?" he said. "I hate to say this, but you look kind of played out."

The Princess nodded in quick agreement. "I know, Joe, I know. The last two weeks have got me down. But I'm doing something about it. I'm pulling up stakes and leaving Marwick. Joe, I'm going to Florida."

"That's the best thing you could do, Elma. Get out on one of those Florida beaches and lie in the sun. Then roll over and let the steady warmth drive your aches and pains away."

It was a lead for what she wanted to say about Chet. Not quite enough of a lead, but she was pleased with the turn the conversation had taken.

"I do need a change of climate," she agreed fervently. "My thyroid began acting up long ago. Now I guess it's quit on me altogether."

"There's never been a complaint against you at headquarters," Joe Downey said, with comforting reassurance. "We know you don't advise boobs to buy gold mines. What's just as important, you don't encourage

mayhem between husbands and wives, and you don't fleece anybody. People who come to you get about the same kind of fortune telling they'd receive if they wrote their troubles to a Lonely Hearts column. I'm sure Florida will let you go on in the same way. Or maybe you've saved enough to retire?"

She responded proudly. "I've got ten thousand in the Marwick Savings and Loan, and six thousand, two hundred and eighty more in government bonds. This place here is mine, and it isn't mortgaged."

Joe shook his head. "An honest cop who has to keep his wife and five kids in hamburgers and shoes and television can't save that kind of money. Well, now that you've got a bankroll, I hope you'll have the wisdom and good sense not to let anybody else get hold of it." He leaned back and slipped his hands into his trousers pockets. "Elma, what's bothering you? Why did you send for me?"

The Princess hesitated, still fearing that if she came right out and told him about Chet his friendliness might decrease. Dare she say to him: "Chet's reformed. Please get the parole board to let Chet go with me to Florida."

No, it wouldn't do to ask such a favor abruptly. It was better to begin with a touch of the old sentiment.

"Joe, I didn't want to leave Marwick without saying goodbye to you," she said. Her voice was softly beguiling, almost tender.

Joe colored slightly. "I'm glad you feel that way, Elma," he replied.

"We've known each other so long," she went on quickly. "In high school for a while we—" The warmth of her smile increased. "I think, Joe, we were really in love."

"I know I was in love with you," he said, reaching out suddenly and patting her hand.

"I—I was too jealous of you, Joe," she said, her eyes on his face. Oddly enough, she had stopped thinking of Chet. "That was why I ran off with that ham orchestra leader. It was a horrible mistake."

"It was my fault as much as yours, Elma," Joe whispered.

"Everything was different then, Joe. And with you everything seemed so wonderful."

Joe nodded. "And there was not any Princess Luxor then. You were Elma Matson, and your father ran the paint shop on Oak Street. You weighed about as much as a handful of feathers. You danced like a professional. You were the nicest, peppiest, cutest girl I ever saw . . . that anybody ever saw."

The pattern of the past glowed with color. "And everything seemed so possible, Joe. After

we were married, I'd get to be a celebrated actress—" she snapped her fingers—"just like that."

"And I'd be playing first base for the New York Giants." Joe blinked and shook his head like a man rousing himself from sleep. He grinned half-heartedly. "And here I am—a flatfoot."

She completed the tally. "And me, a third-class palm-reader." Her bosom heaved as she breathed deeply. "It's too bad we can't live our lives over. Do you remember those notes we wrote?"

He smiled tenderly at her. "I do, Elma—I sure do. I've even saved some of yours. Joe Downey, the Sentimental Sleuth."

"I used to read a few passages to the other girls, but nobody ever really found out our secret."

By a common impulse they clasped hands across the table until, little by little, the picture of the past disintegrated, leaving only a fading nostalgia in its wake.

Joe rose to his feet. "I'll see you again, Elma. I've got to beat it now because I've got a full schedule this morning. I'm a hard-working man with a big family, a mortgaged house and, lately, a small army of rats."

He shoved his chair back into place. "If you're troubled with rats, I can recommend a new kind of dope. It's called 'Vermin Vamoose.' It's not a poison. Rats like it, eat it, and come back for more. Finally they crawl off to die. It keeps the blood from clotting." His voice became hard again. "Speaking of rats, Elma, here's a straight tip."

Somehow, she knew in advance what he was about to say. "Let's have it, Joe. Stock market or race horses?"

He put his fists on the table and leaned toward her. "I've heard that lately a skinny young rodent has been hanging around your place. His name is Chet Furniss. Keep away from him, Elma. He's bad medicine."

That hit hard. Joe was hostile, and he spoke so bitterly and angrily that she realized with a suddenly sinking heart that she could never hope to persuade him to help her with Chet.

"He didn't do that stretch in the reformatory because he was just a misguided kid," Joe went on. "We've had trouble with him ever since he was a boy. He's a smooth talker, so don't let him get started soft-soaping you. Remember, Elma, he's thirty years younger than we are."

She looked at him reproachfully, hiding her disappointment, forcing herself to speak calmly. "The only reason Chet comes here is because he says I give him such good advice," she said.

Joe's lips tightened. "He's a smart monkey with a bad record, Elma. Remember that. He never took good advice from anybody." Joe straightened up, turned and

marched to the door, his face still set in hard lines. "Be seeing you, Elma," he said.

She sat for a moment motionless, telling herself with bleak misgivings that she had failed miserably and would have to contact somebody else.

She had pried herself laboriously out of her chair when the fatigue which in recent weeks had so often overwhelmed her came back with a vengeance. Her heart pounded, skipped a couple of beats, and then went furiously to work as though to make up for lost time.

A ghastly suspicion came unbidden into her mind, a suspicion more alarming than the sudden pounding of her heart. Summoning all of her strength, she barely managed to struggle back to the safety of the chair before her legs gave way.

The notion was so far-fetched, so impossible, that it couldn't be taken seriously. Chet might have his faults—and probably he did have faults—but he wasn't such a double-tongued, treacherous monster as to do anything so cruel—

She rose again from her chair, crossed to the bedroom door and clung there for ten seconds before she could trust her legs to carry her through to the kitchen.

In the kitchen she could demonstrate to herself that her fear was totally groundless. Reaching the bed, she swayed and held fast for an instant to the iron bars. Why, Chet loved her. Time and again he'd told her so. Hadn't he proved it by marrying her? How could she doubt his devotion? Hadn't he proved it by insisting she remain in bed until noon, while he brought her on a tray a breakfast of coffee and toast and a bowl of that new product, *Vito-Viva-Vim—Enriched.*

She'd protested that the new dry breakfast food, heaped with sugar and swimming in cream, contained too many calories. But Chet had kissed her, and said one reason he loved her was because he couldn't stand skinny women.

Clinging to tables and chairs, leaning against friendly walls, she reached the kitchen. For the past fortnight she hadn't had much to do with the kitchen, because Chet had made himself Chief Cook and Bottle-Washer. Lots of men liked to cook. Evidently Chet was one of them. In frantic haste she searched the shelves, her heart pounding again. There was no sign of Vermin Vamoose, only a big carton of Vito-Viva-Vim.

"Thank God," she breathed. "Oh, thank God."

There could be no further doubting of Chet. But a ridiculous, niggling thought refused to be set aside. She owed it to Chet to clear him altogether.

She turned back to the kitchen,

took the Vito-Viva-Vim carton from the shelf and dumped a handful of its contents on the table.

What she saw was hard to believe. The outside of the carton carried a brightly-colored picture of Vito-Viva-Vim flakes. They were thin and wide and as brightly yellow as cornflakes. The breakfast cereal on the table wasn't like that at all. The flakes were small, thick and darkish. And it was these small, darkish flakes which for two weeks Chet had been feeding her.

She caught hold of the table which seemed to have grown unsteady. Only the absurdity of suspecting Chet enabled her to make her next move.

Chet loved her. She knew he loved her. He had proved his devotion in a dozen loving, tender, considerate ways. It was all the fault of the artist—he was probably a very bad artist—who had designed the picture on the Vito-Viva-Vim box. Still and all she had doubted. The future mustn't be clouded by even the shade of a doubt.

The telephone rested on a table just outside the kitchen. Dropping into the nearest chair, she placed the instrument on her lap and dialed. An instant later she was talking to Mr. Schroeder, whose grocery store was directly across the street.

"Mr. Schroeder, this is the Princess Luxor. I wonder if you could send Jimmy over with a couple of items. Perhaps you'd better write them down. Two large cans of tomatoes . . . a bunch of radishes . . . a pint of cottage cheese . . . Yes, that's correct. And please send Jimmy right away."

She labored back to the kitchen table, replaced the Vito-Viva-Vim carton, and brushed all of the stubby, dark flakes into her palm. Some of the cereal went into the garbage can. The rest she placed in a stray envelope which she sealed carefully. Then, with the stub of a pencil, she wrote her message on the envelope.

"Mr. Schroeder." She had difficulty in making her handwriting firm, as once it had been, but somehow she managed. *"I don't know what the enclosed cereal product is. Can you tell me? The cleaning woman said I had rats here, and I think this might be a new foodlike vermin killer she left to get rid of them. Am I right? Please telephone immediately."*

It was long, and very long waiting for Jimmy. But the telephone call seemed to come almost immediately after Jimmy left with the envelope. Her hand trembled so that it was hard for her to hold the receiver.

"Yes, Mr. Schroeder?" she asked, her voice urgent.

"You hit it just right, Princess," the grocer said. "That

stuff in the envelope is Vermin Vamoose, and for rats there's nothing better. The stuff tastes good and they keep on eating it while it gets into their blood stream. Little by little it weakens them and kills them."

Consciousness came back slowly, in fitful, wavering stages. First she became aware that she was awake. Then, little by little, that she was properly in her bed with sheets and blankets tucked securely about her. There drifted back the memory of the immediate past.

She could remember replacing the telephone on its little table and struggling to her feet. Then, with her whole world crumbling into nothingness, she had started back to the bedroom, desperately telling herself she needed to rest and get back a little of her strength before deciding on her next move. She could also remember collapsing across the bed.

She opened her eyes. Chet was bending over her.

"What happened, Honeygoldie?" he asked, in alarm. "You must have fainted."

For the first time, she noticed that his voice was not a caress but a whine. He was no longer a man whom she loved. She saw him simply as a grotesque specimen of the male—stringbeanish, with a weak mouth, round chin, and an obstrusive Adam's apple. Yes—and pale, vague, treacherous blue eyes.

How could she have so ignored her own arts in reading Chet's character? His physiognomy, his handwriting, the very lines on his palm—all told the same story. They all pointed to a total lack of scruple, rascality, utter baseness.

Looking up at him, she found that she hated him. It was a hate violent and blasphemous, such as she had never known before. She had made a will bequeathing to him all she possessed. And all the while he had been planning to kill her.

Calling on all her reserve power, she managed a smile. "I—I guess, Chet, I exerted myself a little too much."

"You mustn't do that, Honeygoldie. I've always warned you about that." The whiny voice rose. "Why don't you just relax and get a good sleep and everything will come out all right."

That was for the birds. But a plan had presented itself. If only her strength would last long enough—

"Chet, I'm dying," she whispered. This she knew to be the truth.

He leaned quickly toward her. "Don't say such things, Honeygoldie," he murmured, feigning concern.

"No—it's true. I 'm dying, Chet."

"Stop talking that way, Honey-

goldie. You've got a better color than I've seen on your face for weeks."

She hated him and everything about him. The sly, cruel hypocrite. How he must have laughed when she'd proposed that lifelong honeymoon in Florida! She had been an idiot, but he had been a remorseless scoundrel who deserved all he was going to get.

"Chet, over there on the bureau there's a pad of paper and a pencil. I want you to write down what I dictate—every word. It's to help you."

"But, Honeygoldie, you're worrying about nothing. I've fixed things with—"

"Do as I tell you, Chet. Quickly. There isn't much time . . . Are you ready? Every word now, just as I say it. For the information of Joe Downey." It was hard to concentrate. Between her thoughts and Chet's moving fingers there kept obtruding her hatred of him and her stupidity in ever trusting him.

The right words came slowly. "Chet Furniss is my beloved husband, period." She went on, her voice growing firmer. "Fed up as I have been with my many physical disabilities, I have been happy, because Chet has made my life worth living. Me—well, Joe I am about to die, but that doesn't matter to me if Chet is assured of happiness. Breakfasts with Chet have been the brightest spots of my mornings because he has always been so kind and so tender. Of course I am older than Chet, but that has never made him love me the less. 'Rat' was what you called poor Chet this morning and it certainly hurt me, Joe, and you know you were wrong in using such a term as applied to Chet. Dope this out for yourself, Joe—I love Chet because he has been so good to me, and I want you to do everything in your power to help him."

With a supreme effort, she forced herself to read what had been written and, straining to the limit, wrote her endorsement. "I have read the above and it is exactly as I dictated it. Elma Matson Furniss — Princess Luxor."

"That's wonderful, Honeygoldie." Chet placed the paper in his billfold. "I'll keep it always. You know how much I love you and how much you love me."

What happened next was unreasonable, unaccountable, ridiculous. For some reason those final words had sent her heart into a tailspin.

He didn't love her but she loved him. Yes . . . yes. And she still loved him. He'd killed her and she loved him.

For three months and seventeen days he had transformed her empty existence into a life worth living. Three and a half

months wasn't such a long time. But it more than paid for the empty years before. If now she was dying, perhaps only a little before her appointed time, what of it?

Impulsively she whispered, "Chet, how could you ever stand for a fat, old hag like me?"

"You're nothing like that, Honeygoldie. To me you've always been beautiful. I couldn't help loving you."

A lie, of course. He'd never meant any of his flattering, deceitful words. But those words had changed the world for her.

"Tell me again, Chet. Tell me you love me."

He kissed her. "You bet I love you, Honeygoldie. There's never been anybody like you. There's no woman in the world for me but you."

Lies and lies again. But it did not matter.

He laid his hand on her cheek. It was wonderful to feel his hand. Perhaps he would place his lips against hers at the very end, when every light in the world went out.

With a start she realized the horrible thing that she had done. It ought to have occurred to her before, but it hadn't.

"Chet, darling—" She could feel the anguish in her voice.

"What is it, Honeygoldie?"

"That letter I told you to write— Chet, tear it up."

"Why should I tear it up, Honeygoldie?"

She was ashamed. She couldn't tell him the reason. But the letter she had dictated must be destroyed. Her hands clenched feebly as she tried to make him understand how urgent it was. In spite of that, her voice could barely be heard. "Chet—please. Tear it up."

"Look, Honeygoldie, ever after you're well I want to keep that paper as a souvenir so I'll never forget what you did for me."

Though a growing languor held them fast, she tried to raise her hands to him. She had made up her mind. Even if he must hate her, she would tell him what she had done. "Chet—Chet, darling, tear it up. Burn it. Don't show it to Joe. We'll write another that'll really help you . . . Please . . . I love you, Chet. I don't care what you've done . . . I love you . . . I'll explain why you've got to tear it up . . . It's because . . . because . . ."

Her voice lapsed into an unintelligible murmur. As she tried to say what she knew she had to say, the ceiling wavered and whirled while a cold mist thickened and choked her, cutting off light and sound and consciousness.

It was a hunch from the blue which brought Joe Downey to

the home of the Princess Luxor at twelve fifteen that noon. Something, the hunch insisted, was wrong.

His knock went unanswered and, finding the studio empty, he wasted a cynical look at the legend under the portrait: "Knows All: Tells All." Plainly the Princess didn't know all—not by a long shot.

Few people did.

His experience had made him trust hunches. This one told him plainly that something was wrong. He opened the studio door into the bedroom beyond. There he saw what, in some obscure way, had activated the hunch. On the bed, beneath the white coverlet, the staring, motionless lump was Elma.

He hurried to the bedside and touched the flaccid throat. Like the wrists, the great arteries were without pulse. When he turned down the bed covers and bent his head to the dead woman's breast, he caught no answering heartbeat. Crossing the room to the bureau, he found a hand-mirror and held it before her mouth. The glass remained unclouded.

He pressed the eyelids over the dulled eyes, pulled the sheet across the face, and turned away with a strangled sob.

In the kitchen doorway Chet had appeared. He walked toward the detective, his face drooping dismally. "She's gone, Joe," he said. "I'll never get over this. That's a fact, Joe."

The detective grunted. "What were you doing here, Chet?"

Chet's eyes opened wide as though in surprise. The whiny voice with which he had reproached the sidewalk public when it was reluctant to buy his trick cards or his racing form sheets, rose in protest.

"Why, Joe, didn't Elma ever tell you? We're married."

For an instant Joe's poker face slipped. "Married!"

"That's right, Joe." From his billfold Chet extracted a document printed in green ink and turned it over to the detective. "Here's the marriage license. We went across the state line to get hitched because Elma felt, if her public knew she had a husband, it would hurt business. But you and her were such old friends, I thought she'd told you."

Joe returned the license. "Better hang onto this, Chet. You may need it."

The bereaved husband went on aggressively, "I know my reputation is not so good with you boys because I made a lot of mistakes. But ever since I met Elma, I been walking a straight line."

Chet replaced the marriage license and pulled out a second paper. "Just before Elma died, she dictated this, and she checked over every word." He placed it

in the detective's hands. "Read it." He watched Joe's face. "Look at the way she signed it."

The detective folded the paper carefully and placed it in his own pocket.

Chet reached out a protesting hand. "But Joe, that's mine."

"It's addressed to me, Chet."

"Look, Joe, I might need it later to show somebody else. Poor Elma certainly knew me right down to the ground, and here she tells just what she thinks of me."

"That's right, Chet. And you might as well know now, I'll have a couple of the boys go through this house with a fine-tooth comb. And there'll be a *post mortem.*"

The whiny voice became shrill and tense. "*Post mortem*—what for a *post mortem?*"

Joe's voice remained level. "In cases like this, Chet, there's always a *post mortem.* You see, when Elma and I were kids, we used a sort of code when we wrote each other notes: only the first word in each sentence counted."

He retrieved the paper from his pocket and, unfolding it, held it at a safe distance from Chet. "Here's what Elma really said in the note. 'Chet—fed—me — breakfasts — of — rat — dope.'

"Better pick up a toothbrush, Chet. Where you're going you may have to stay a while."

Leading the entertainment parade in next month's all-star issue is a brand-new Saint adventure as stirringly glamorful as a drum corps majorette in full-dress regalia. It's called THE GOLDEN FROG, *and it concerns that amazing biological oddity, the gilded frog of Panama*—atelopus zeteki—*and a certain "Professor" Nester and his wily "daughter." They were speeding along Crime Highway, exploiting the frog as a gold mine, when Simon stepped boldly and roguishly into view and re-routed them straight toward Justice Turnpike. You won't want to miss this exciting and brilliantly plotted Charteris saga.*

the ring and the finger

by . . . Frank Gruber

He had covered his tracks well. But an accusing finger still branded him a murderer — and the coroner had a verdict ready.

WHEN I LET MYSELF into the apartment Tommy Flood was slouched in the red leather easy chair. I said, "Hello" and he didn't even look up. I tossed my hat on a table, lit a cigarette, and sat down on the sofa.

"You're home early and you look like hell," I said. "So you had a fight with Ethel."

He was biting his finger-nails. He never uses a nail file because he never has any nails to file. They're always chewed right down to the quick. He kept on biting around at this thumb nail, but his shaggy eyebrows rose and he looked at me.

"It was our last fight," he said. "We re through. Finished." He laughed. "She tied the can to me."

"Oh, I dunno, Tommy," I said, trying to cheer him up. "You and her have had spats before. You'll make up."

"Not this time, Hank," he said. "I never told you what most of our fights have been about. I may as well, now. I've had competition, and the competition won out. She's going to

Frank Gruber's first love was the taut-fibered mystery thriller with a corpse in the opening chapter and a grim harvest of retribution at the end. He has since flirted with Westerns, riding out on the bleak Dakota plains with General Custer and engaging in battle with the Sioux. But every so often he returns to the hard-hitting mystery melodramas that skyrocketed him to fame. We think you'll like this exciting little yarn.

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marry him. The big, greasy cluck!"

"Tell me about it," I urged. I figured it would make him feel better to get it off his chest. I didn't want to mope around for a week. I've seen his spells before. Me, I'm a cheerful guy. I don't like crepe around the place.

Tommy examined what was left of his left thumb, and started nibbling on the right. "The guy's name is Cochrane, Bill Cochrane," he says. "You know me, Hank. I like a quiet movie. I never cared a helluva lot for goin' to a dance hall. But Ethel's nuts about dancing, and this Bill Cochrane practically lives at dance halls. He can even do the big apple or little banana or what have you?"

I shook my head. "So you been takin' it from her, huh?"

"Yeah. She's been dating this Cochrane Wednesdays and Sundays, and giving me only Saturdays. I couldn't stand it no more last night. I told her she had to make up her mind which one of us she wanted. She said Cochrane."

"So she gave you back the ring?"

He shook his head. "She said Cochrane, but she didn't give back the ring. We had words and I walked out on her. To hell with the ring. She can keep it."

"Well, Tommy," I said, "I only met Ethel a couple of times. But to tell you the truth I knew from the start you two couldn't have hit it off. So maybe it's just as well."

"Yeah, Hank," he agreed, but his face got even longer. "I guess you're right. But I really went for her and it hurts."

Well, the next day was Sunday, and Tommy moped around all day. I laid low most of the day, even sitting through a double feature movies, plus Donald Duck and a newsreel, in the evening.

When I got home he had the smoke in the place so thick you could have cut it with a knife. He'd moved from the red leather chair to the sofa, but otherwise he looked just the same. Still grouching. . . .

I got the mail in the morning —Monday. There was a package for Tommy. He was dressing to go to work and looking better, but when he saw the little box his pan fell again.

"The ring," he said. "She's mailed it back to me." He opened the package, and sure enough it was the ring. There was a little typed note with it, too.

He read it aloud: " 'Give it to the next one. My finger was turning green anyway!' Green! Why the—"

He threw the ring across the room. It hit the wall and bounced back to the other side. I spotted where it fell and after a minute

picked it up. Then I took it to the bedroom and dropped it in his dresser drawer. After all, I knew he'd paid seventy-five bucks for the thing, and there was no sense letting the maid pick it up with the vacuum sweeper.

Well, I went off to the mail-order house where I've got a job. I figured Tommy's gone to work, too, but when I got back to the flat around six-thirty, he was parked on the sofa again.

"What the hell?" I asked. "Didn't you go to work?"

"No," he said. "I called 'em up, and told 'em I was sick."

"Over a dame," I snorted. "Come on, Tommy, pull yourself together. She wasn't worth that."

"I know it," he said. "But I can't help it. I'm that way, Hank."

Then this guy pounded the door from the outside. Tommy didn't even look up so I went over, and let him in. I didn't recognize him from Tommy's description because he was really not a bad-looking sort at all. Well, if Tommy hadn't been my pal, I'd have said he was better looking than Tommy.

"Tom Flood live here?"

Tommy got up when he heard the voice. He said, "What the hell, Cochrane, what you want here?"

So it was Bill Cochrane, the successful rival! He came into the living-room, and I let the door swing shut. I figured maybe I'd better hang around. Cochrane was a pretty husky fellow. He weighed more than Tommy, but in the mood Tommy was in he'd probably try climbing this guy's frame and get his ears knocked down. And after all, a pal's a pal.

"I came to talk to you about Ethel," this Cochrane said.

"What for?" snapped Tommy. "She gave me the gate, didn't she? What more do you want? She's *all yours.*"

"Is she? You were out with her Saturday night, weren't you?" Cochrane looked at Tommy—hard and kind of funny.

Tommy snorted. "I wasn't out with her. I was up to her place, and she told me off. She said she was goin' to go steady with you from now on. So what? Did you come around here to crow about it?"

"No. I came to find out where Ethel is."

Tommy blinked at Cochrane. "What?" he asked, surprised. "Why, you oughtta know more about that than me. Sunday night's yours, isn't it?"

"It was. I had a date with her last night. But she wasn't home. I hung around all evening, but she didn't show up. This morning I asked her landlady about it. Nobody in the rooming house saw her all day

yesterday. That's why I came here."

"Now, wait a minute," Tommy said. "Let's get this straight. Ethel stood you up. Well, she wasn't home anyway. So you come to see me. Why? I told you she threw me over, didn't I?"

"Yeah," said Bill Cochrane. "But she told me lots of things about you. She said you was screwy. I know damn well she was scared stiff of you."

I didn't blame Tommy for getting mad then. In fact I was getting kind of sore at this Cochrane guy myself. Tommy started for him. "Why, you greasy, dancin'—" he began.

Then he stopped, and a funny look came over his face. I looked at Cochrane and he had a rod in his fist!

"Easy, Flood!" Cochrane said. "You come too close and I'll let you have this!"

I figured it was time to put in my two-cents worth. "Put away the bazooka, mug. Where do you think you are?"

"I dunno," replied Cochrane. "But Ethel's told me things about this guy here. I brought along the gun just in case he tried to get funny with *me*."

"Nuts," I said. "I've known Tommy for years. You don't need no gun to talk to him. I know you two don't like each other, being stuck on the same girl. But you can talk it over without fireworks, can't you?"

Cochrane gave me the once over, then put the gun in his coat pocket. But he kept his hand close to it. "All right, Flood, let's talk it over then—without the rough stuff. You were the last one to see Ethel."

Tommy went back to the sofa. "I saw her Saturday night. But I left her about ten. She broke our engagement on account of you, she said. All right, I came home. Hank knows that. I was here when he got in around eleven-thirty. Then this morning, she mails me back the ring.

"That's right," I said. "I saw him open it. She wrote a note with it."

"Do you want to see it?" asked Tommy.

Cochrane shook his head. "I'll take your word for that—for the moment," he said. "But Mrs. Kleinman, her landlady, told me she wasn't in her room at all yesterday."

"Maybe she spent the day with some girl friend," Tommy said.

Cochrane frowned. "No, I called up this Peggy who works with her at the dime store. She didn't see Ethel all day yesterday. And she didn't show up for work today."

"That's nothing. I didn't go to work either. After all—well, me and her went together almost a year. Why shouldn't she be torn up?"

"Torn up enough to get her pay docked?" said Bill Cochrane.

"Hell, Ethel's measly twenty bucks a week didn't give her a chance to save any dough. She had a hard time payin' her room rent and gettin' her meals out of it."

"Yeah, I know," admitted Tommy. "I bought her a lot of stuff for Christmas. Stockings, underwear . . ."

Bill Cochrane busted wide open then. Which if Tommy had stopped to think, wouldn't have surprised him. No guy likes to think of his girl having had another guy buy underwear for her. *No guy.*

"You dirty—" Cochrane yelled, and started for Tommy.

This time I stopped it. I jumped in front of Cochrane and pushed him back. "Take it easy, pal!" I gave him. "Tommy and her was engaged. They were goin' to be married."

Cochrane eased off. "All right, she had hard luck. A lousy, cheap job. Not much chance to meet the right sort of fellas. So she let herself be engaged. All right. But she talked to me about this guy and look—if I don't get any satisfaction I'm going to the cops."

"What?" exclaimed Tommy.

"You heard me," Cochrane said grimly. "I know what I know and I got my suspicions. Ethel's disappeared. I know she didn't leave all her stuff in her room and hop a train to Florida or Hollywood. She's gone and I want to know where she is! If I don't find out, the cops will."

Tommy got up again, and I talked quick to Cochrane. "Now, wait a minute, chum. Are you hinting that Tommy might, well —that he *did* something to this Ethel?"

"I'm not hinting," Cochrane came back. "Not any more. I'm saying it out loud. Ethel told me what a screwball he was. I know she was scared of him and I don't like the set up one bit. I'm tellin' you—"

By this time I couldn't hold Tommy back. He was frothing at the mouth, and trying to get at Bill Cochrane. I had to wrestle around with him, and when I finally got him down on the sofa, Cochrane had gone, leaving the door wide open.

I walked across and closed the door. "Tommy," I said. "That guy meant it. He's gone to call the cops."

"Let him," Tommy said. "I haven't seen Ethel since Saturday night. Was that guy hinting that maybe I knocked her off? Why, the lousy—"

I calmed him down. He even went and combed his hair and put on his coat so he wouldn't look so wild. And then Cochrane came back. Yeah, with a cop.

Tommy held himself in pretty well. The detective, after all, had merely a routine report to go on, and he treated Tommy

respectfully. He asked him some questions which Tommy answered and after a while asked Tommy if he was willing to come down to Headquarters and let the captain ask some more questions. They didn't seem to want me along, so I stuck around the apartment.

The thing was goofy, of course. I figured this Ethel dame had got herself all worked up over her love affairs, then had chucked things and headed for places unknown—probably her home. Tommy told me one time she'd come from out West.

I emptied the ash trays that Tommy had filled up during the day, straightened up the place a little. For no reason at all I looked through Tommy's dresser drawer and discovered he'd located the ring he'd tossed around that morning. Anyway it wasn't there. He probably had it in his vest pocket.

I was straightening things out in the closet when I came across some of Tommy's tools. I didn't think much about it at the time.

Tommy was a sheet metal worker, and lots of times he went out on a job. When he finished around quitting time he usually brought his tools home with him, and took them down to the shop again in the morning.

After about an hour, Tommy came home. He was feeling more chipper than I'd seen him since before Saturday night.

"Well, what happened?" I asked.

"What could happen? The cops asked me a lot of questions and I give them the answers. The greaseball gives them a song and dance about Ethel having told him I'd threatened to kill her. Can you imagine that?"

"What about her?" I asked. "The bunch of you figure out where she's gone?"

He shrugged. "I gave them her home address. She comes from a jerkwater town in Iowa. She lived with her aunt. Her folks are dead. They're going to telephone to find out if she's there. The flatfoot who was here is going to snoop around her room, and then go to the dime store. About the time they get through with that Ethel'll walk in, and ask them what the hell they think they're doing."

We left it at that. Then the dick came around when I got home from work the next day with the information that they hadn't been able to get any information. Ethel Kennard hadn't gone home to Iowa; they'd telephoned. Her aunt said she hadn't even heard from Ethel in two years. Ethel was sore at her. The girls at the dime store didn't know anything about her. Bill Cochrane hadn't heard a whisper from her. She had disappeared.

Well, girls turn up missing in a big city every day. I read a story about them once. It was

called "Disappearing Girls" or something, and it was about white slavery. I didn't tell Tommy about the story, though. He was feeling chipper again, and had gone back to work.

Then, on Wednesday morning, came this other package. Tommy opened it and unfolded another note. "Listen to this!" he yelped. "It's from Ethel!"

I found this Woolworth cigarette case you gave me on my birthday and I don't want anything of yours to remind me of you. Put it with the ring.

The cigarette case was wrapped in tissue paper and when Tommy started to open it I grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute. Don't touch it! That thing's chromium, and it'll hold prints. Give it to the cops!"

"Aw, now look, Hank," he said, "the cops aren't going to bother me any more, are they?"

"You can't tell about them," I said, shaking my head. "If Ethel mailed that to you, her fingerprints will be all over it. And say—" I made a dive for the wrapping paper he'd dropped to the floor.

"There's no return address on this, but it's postmarked Milwaukee."

"She's in Milwaukee!" he said.

I went with him to the precinct house. Lieutenant Jacobsen, the dick who had come to our place with Cochrane, took the case and looked it over.

"Mmm," he said, "there're prints all right. But what good are they?"

"Why, they'll prove that Ethel handled the case, won't they?" asked Tommy.

"Sure, but the return address says she's in Milwaukee. So what? She went to Milwaukee. That isn't against the law."

I saw his point. If she was in Milwaukee she was alive. So it wasn't a police case. If a girl jilts a man for another, and then decides what the hell, she don't even want the other, she has every right to up and go to a city ninety miles away, hasn't she? It's a free country.

We got back to the apartment, picking up a bite of supper on the way. In the lobby of the building Cochrane was waiting for us. He was alone, but his right coat pocket was sagging again.

"Now what, Bad News?" Tommy snapped at him.

"Let's talk some more," Cochrane said. "Upstairs."

Tommy would just as soon have argued it out with him downstairs, but me, I saw the supe sticking out his long ears from behind the elevator shaft, and I hustled the two of them up to our living room and bedroom on the fourth floor.

When we got inside, Cochrane began: "Lieutenant Jacob-

sen phoned me a few minutes ago. Said you'd got a cigarette case from Ethel. Let's see it."

Tommy digs it out of his pocket. The lieutenant hadn't even wanted to keep it. "And the paper, too," said Tommy.

"The address is typed," Cochrane said. "So's the letter. *You* could have mailed the package yourself, except that it's postmarked in Milwaukee yesterday, and you were at work all day."

"See, Cochrane?" I said.

"I see," said Cochrane. "Except he *wasn't* at work yesterday. I trailed him from here at seven-thirty in the morning, and followed him out to Lincoln Park, then downtown. I lost him at the Public Library. He could have got over to the North Shore Railway, taken it to Milwaukee, and have been back by six in the afternoon."

"I could have, but I didn't, wise guy," Tommy sneered. "I knew you was following me all the time, and I went to the State-Lake Theater after I shook you off."

I stared at Tommy uneasily. Tommy hadn't exactly told me he'd missed work on Tuesday, but I'd gathered the impression that he had. It seemed to me that the apartment got a little colder.

Then Tommy handed the cigarette case, still wrapped in the tissue paper, to Cochrane. "All right, wise guy, try your detective stuff on this. Lieutenant Jacobsen didn't care to. But go ahead. Dust the case with powder, and check on the prints. You'll find that mine aren't on it. The prints *are* Ethel's."

Cochrane looked at Tommy through narrowed eyelids, then took the case carefully, so as not to touch it with his own fingers. "I'm not a fingerprint expert," he said. "But I think I'll take this along, if you're quite sure you want me to have it."

"If it'll keep your ugly map from around here, you're welcome to it," said Tommy. "Take it back to the cops. Maybe they've got some of Ethel's prints from her room. Have them compare them with this case. Then let me alone."

Tommy began chewing his nails again while I wandered around the apartment. I looked in the closet in our room. Why, I don't know. I'd lived with Tommy in this dump for over a year. I figured I knew him pretty well.

But his tool kit wasn't in the closet.

I came out into the living room. "If you weren't working yesterday, Tommy, how come your tools are gone?"

Tommy looked at me, and all of a sudden I didn't feel so good. He didn't answer very quick and when he did, he wasn't biting his nails.

"Now, Hank," he said. "*You're* not going to start asking questions?"

"No," I answered. "Only I noticed you had your tools home and they're gone now. And you haven't been to work since last week."

Then Tommy got sore. "Hank, I'm not feeling so good as it is. I hate people who mistrust me. If that's the way you feel, all right. I'll pack my duds and get out of here."

I couldn't keep the apartment alone on my fifty-four bucks a week. Tommy knew it. But things had been getting on my nerves lately. I got damned tired of Tommy sitting around biting his fingernails and moping, and his eyes staring at me every time I happened to look in his direction.

So I said, "If that's the way you feel, Tommy . . ."

He jumped up from the red leather chair, and snapped up the classified phone directory. He looked around for a while, then got the phone and called a number.

"Hello, Ajax Express? Can you send a wagon around to 24 East Armitage? Yeah, Apartment 4-B. A trunk, yeah, big wardrobe. Okay, right away."

He hung up and looked at me. "I'm packing. If you think I'm going to swipe any of your stuff, come on, watch me."

"Nix, Tommy," I said. "We've roomed together over a year. If we bust up, we don't have to fight about it, do we?"

That cooled him off. He went into the bedroom and got out a suitcase. He packed his shirts and underwear, then unlocked that big wardrobe trunk of his, and put in some stuff. He even asked me to give him a hand in lifting out the compartment. I gave him a hand and saw that the big section underneath was almost filled up. I hadn't even known he had that much clothes.

After awhile he had the trunk and the suitcase packed and about that time the expressman pounded on the door.

"This is it, Hank," Tommy said to me.

Tommy let him in. He was a big, husky fellow. "In the bedroom," Tommy told him. "The trunk. I'll take the suitcase with me."

The expressman went into the bedroom. I heard him grunt, and then the thump of the trunk as he raised it up on end. Silence a moment, then he exclaimed, "For the love Mike, this thing is heavy. What you got in—lead?"

Tommy went into the bedroom. "I got my books in it, that's all. What's the matter, are you muscle-bound?"

The expressman grunted something. Then the two of them came out, carrying the trunk. Even though Tommy held one

end I could see the expressman was still lifting plenty of weight.

I watched them carry the thing out of the door, to the elevator. Tommy came back for his suitcase.

"Any mail comes for me, Hank," he said, "I'll be at the Sorenson Hotel for a couple of days."

I just nodded. He looked around, half saluted and said, "So long, Hank."

When the door closed I wanted to call him back.

I lit a cigarette, and it tasted like dried cabbage leaves. I threw it away. It was getting dark in the room, and I put on all the lights. It didn't help.

I went to the bedroom and thought about sleeping in my bed. It didn't appeal to me so much. I said out loud, "What the hell?" and went to the closet for my own suitcase.

I told myself I couldn't keep up the rent alone anyway. I was paid up to the end of the week, but I might just as well move at once. What if I did lose a few days' rent?

I didn't hear the outside door open, but all of a sudden Tommy was in the doorway of the bedroom. He said, "You moving too, Hank?"

I guess I almost swallowed my tonsils. Tommy was grinning at me. "I changed my mind about moving to the Sorenson," he said. "I had the expressman take both my trunk and suitcase to the Union Depot and check them there."

He knew all right. I knew that he knew, and there wasn't any use playing the cat and mouse game. "You told the expressman the trunk was heavy because it was full of books," I said. "But you didn't have any books, Tommy."

He cocked his head to one side and looking at his eyes I wondered how I'd never noticed before that they were so wild looking. Surely, he'd acted screwy enough at times.

"He caught me by surprise, Hank," Tommy said, still grinning. "The book thing popped out. I saw that you got it. And that tool stuff—you were already getting wise. You know what's in that trunk . . ."

I'd been fairly sure the last fifteen minutes. Tommy was a sheet metal worker. He'd been home on Monday. He could have made a sheet metal box to fit inside his trunk, soldered it shut air-proof, and tossed clothes in on top . . . after *the thing* had been put into the box.

"Yes, Henry," he went on. "I see that you know. That's too bad, Henry, really too bad. I loved you like a brother. Yet, I loved Ethel, too!"

"So you killed her," I said hoarsely. "You killed her, and brought her body up the back way Saturday night. You kept

it in a trunk, all day Sunday. Then Monday you made a sheet metal box."

"That's very good, Hank," Tommy said. "You got it all figured out. And Tuesday I ran up to Milwaukee, and mailed myself the cigarette case. I put the fingerprints on it, too, *in Milwaukee.*"

That didn't sink in for a minute. But when it did, I yelped. "No, you must have put the fingerprints on it before you went to Milwaukee."

"Wrong," grinned Tommy. He reached into his vest pocket and the light flashed on the diamond ring he pulled out. But I didn't even see the ring. I saw only the thing the ring encircled.

Ethel's finger.

I almost keeled over. And that was the moment Tommy picked to yank out the blackjack and start toward me.

STATEMENT BY LIEUTENANT JACOBSEN OF THE CHICAGO POLICE:

If Sergeant Wilkins hadn't been out for his dinner I probably wouldn't have got into the case at all. But I'm watching the desk when this William Cochrane comes in, and makes the complaint about the girl, Ethel Kennard being missing. Right off he starts talking about foul play.

Well, most people who report a missing person suspect foul play, so I don't think much about it. But as there's only a patrolman and myself in the station at the time I tell the patrolman to sit behind the desk while I go with Cochrane.

The guy Cochrane suspects is using the name of Thomas Flood and he's living with a fellow named Henry Bradshaw. Bradshaw's a husky, clean-cut young fellow and looks okay to me. I wouldn't have tied up Flood with Glen Waters except that Waters was a sheet metal worker, too.

Anyway, the Glen Waters affair is four years old. And in the first place we had nothing on Waters, excepting the descriptions the neighbors had given at the time. He'd been smart enough to wipe off the casket in which we found the Tolliver girl, and no fingerprints had been left lying around.

But when I learn that Flood's a sheet metal worker, too, and began to mull over the similarity in the names—*Flood-Waters*—and remember that Waters had a phobia about water, always taking three baths a day, I get interested. Only I don't let on to Flood, or this Cochrane.

Of course there wasn't anything on which to hold Flood. I let him go, without arousing his suspicions. I went to the cheap lodging house where the girl, Ethel Kennard, had roomed.

I went over it with a fine comb. I got plenty of her prints, but even though Flood was supposed to have visited her on Saturday I didn't find a single one of *his* prints.

Her suitcase was there but she didn't have much in the way of clothes. Her bed was mussed as if she'd slept in it Saturday night, but I knew she hadn't. There wasn't any blood, so he must have forced her to go to his place, probably by the alley door and up the back stairs, so they wouldn't be seen.

Well, there still wasn't anything to go by. She *might* have just lit out without taking any clothes. There wasn't a thing I could do except put a tail on Flood. And wait. If he thought himself safe, chances were he'd over-play his hand.

Clancy picked him up Tuesday morning. This Cochrane was shadowing him at the same time, and that mussed up the thing. Cochrane got in the way, and when Flood lost Cochrane, Clancy lost him as well. But then, when Clancy saw Flood coming home in the afternoon, he didn't have the package with him.

I was plenty sore about losing that package but later I discovered it held only his tools. He'd already had the ring mailed to himself. For some reason he wanted to get rid of the tools, probably to make his roommate think he'd been at work that day. It's smart to be thorough.

Well, during Tuesday I checked at the sign factory where Flood worked. The foreman told me he hadn't been on the job since Friday. He'd been with the company a year and a half. He had a union card made out in the name of Flood.

I still didn't have enough to make the pinch, but when on Wednesday he came in with the cigarette case it was all I could do to keep from grabbing him then and there. But to be on the safe side I let him go—even let him take the case with him. It wasn't evidence. He'd probably made sure about the prints beforehand. I chased Cochrane back to worry Flood some more. His roommate, too. Bradshaw looked like a bright lad, and I figured if he was given plenty to think about something might come of it.

It worked. Flood called the express company to take away his trunk. Detective Moynihan took the driver's place. Then, at the last minute, Flood changed the address, and gave Moynihan the suitcase too. He told him to check both at the Union Depot, then tore back into the apartment with a wild look in his eyes.

I knew what that meant, and followed. I had a little trouble getting the door open but when I heard the noise inside I put

my shoulder to it and heaved. And there Flood was—the ring and the finger in one hand, and in the other, a blackjack—whaling away at Henry Bradshaw. And Bradshaw was hanging on, blood all over his face. He saw me and yelled:

"I got him!" Like a guy who's caught a wildcat and couldn't let go.

"He won't get away, Hank!"

Well, when I saw that finger in his hand, and guessed about the trunk, when I saw how he was battering poor Bradshaw with a blackjack, I just figured I'd save the State the expense of of a trial.

It was a close call at that. A very close call. Perhaps I shouldn't have let it go as far as I did. But how was I to guess about that finger? How was I to know he'd cut it off with the ring on Saturday night and had been carrying it around in his vest pocket all the while. Why, if we'd searched him Monday night when we had him at the station for questioning . . . I wonder what he thought when he bit his own fingers to the bone. Like the coroner said . . .

Science fiction and detective fiction may not ascend exactly parallel moving stairways to the high bright entertainment world which storytellers of genius have superimposed on our three-dimensional workaday world. But that the two stairways often converge can hardly be disputed. Mystery lovers like mystery, per se, *and the imaginative insight and ingenuity which can satisfy both the claims of logic, and our human need to escape from the commonplace in a suspenseful pursuit of the unknown. And in the current issue of* THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *now on sale, the two stairways converge with a dramatic impact which will explain exactly what we mean. For in Ed M. Clinton's unusual lead novelette,* EPIDEMIC ON VENUS, *there's a glowing kernel of mystery story excitement which radiates outward through the entire yarn. And blending with it is a spiral nebula kind of gleam from such a glittering galaxy of writers as Evelyn Smith, Dal Stevens, Eric Frank Russell, Norman Arkawy and Arthur Sellings.*

murder from a book

by . . . Leonard J. Guardino

A perfect crime is something of an accomplishment, evil though it may be. But in the Philippines a dead man may fill the wrong grave.

I, Osco Brono, Manila detective, smiled when I read an item in a Manila newspaper which said that a rich American jeweler vacationing in The Philippines, had donated to the whole population of Naguilian, seventy-nine wrist watches of exquisite workmanship. He had then regrettably sailed back to America.

Not only did the item amuse me—it brought back memories. I remembered the peasant village of Naguilian very well, for I'd been a guerrilla there in the war days. Naguilian's population at that time had consisted of only ten little people. Then, overnight, there were none—as the tragic Yank song goes. The Japs killed them while I was in the hills fighting.

Quite by accident on the following day, I picked up a Manila newspaper again. Naguilian was once more in the news—but not because of the watches. An elderly rice farmer had committed suicide by hanging himself in his barn. Nothing had been taken

Every so often the Saint, or Leslie Charteris, if you prefer—for surely an author and his characters are one and indivisible—takes time out from sleuthing to bring to our attention a new young writer of quite astonishing talents. Such a writer is Leonard Guardino, and this is his second appearance in our pages. Mr. Guardino lives in Brooklyn, and is an ex-G. I. Joe with a knapsack of Far-Eastern story gems sparklingly cut and polished.

except the unfortunate man's own life. The watch around his wrist had remained as intact as the rope around his neck.

The item went on to state something incongruous—that the dead man had been in the habit of roaming his farm bare-footed, simply because he could not tie his own shoe-laces. Now, I am not a detective for nothing. I asked myself: "How can a man put knots in a rope to hang himself if he is unable to tie his shoe-laces?"

As the fine Pangasinan proverb so pithily divulges: "He who tries to see from afar must be stopped by the horizon." Which meant, of course, that I had to take the first express train leaving Manila to examine Naguilian's strange horizon very scrupulously at close range.

Many hours later I arrived at the tiny village. I had no sooner descended from the train than my attention was drawn to a group of people who were comparing and admiring their wrist watches with an almost childish eagerness. Much engrossed, they did not notice my tall, city-ish appearance until a lanky, ragged Filippino boy examined my wrists and asked me why I wore no timepiece. I explained that I possessed a pocket-watch which kept me just as accurately informed as to the time, and was as easy to operate.

"Do you know where I can find Ezro Bogado's farm?" I asked.

"His farm—yes," the boy replied promptly. "But Ezro—no. He is dead from hanging, sir. I am his son, Marcho. Are you a detective?"

I looked at him, surprised. How had he guessed? My neat white flannels and panama hat seldom failed to convince the general run of people that I was a gentleman. With a smile I admitted I was Osco Brono, a detective from Manila.

The lanky youth looked smug and secretive. He said, "Sir, it was I who phoned the newspaper that my father had hung himself. Also that he did not know how to tie his shoe-laces. He would not have known even if he had possessed shoes — which he didn't."

I frowned. "If he did not even own a pair of shoes I may have taken too much for granted," I said, staring at the boy in wonder.

I began asking more questions, but Marcho parried them, growing strangely surly and evasive.

Then he glanced at his wrist watch and said: "This is my day off from work. Come. I will take you to the farm where you may question my mother, *copper.*"

Resentful of his disrespectful attitude, I tagged along cautiously, telling myself, that Marcho was one to watch—boy or not. I even wondered if the Filippino

kid was capable of implicating his own mother in the strange affair?

It was nearly twelve noon when we reached the Bogado farm according to Marcho's wrist watch. I did not even glance at my own timepiece. I simply looked at the kid's, my eyes quickly and carefully combing the house and barn. Mrs. Bogado, a gaunt, prematurely aged woman, met us at the door, and became almost instantly talkative. As I sat facing her inside the old farmhouse I marveled at her eagerness to answer my questions.

The late Ezro Bogado, it seemed had been in the habit of waking his wife with the statement: "I'm going to saddle up the water-buffalo. Be on the ricefield at five." And Mrs. Bogado, having been told, would go back to sleep, wake up just a bit before five and be on the field punctually at the time agreed on.

"On that fateful morning," said Mrs. Bogado, with a surprising command of English, "Ezro woke me at four-thirty, as usual. I nodded to him and went back to sleep. I awoke later, a little before five, dressed, and went downstairs to see if Ezro had gone to work. That's when I burst into tears. Ezro was hanging from a bamboo-rafter, dead!"

She wept silently as she finished. Her son smiled and said: "Mr. Brono, I work on another farm. My mother's farm, as you can see, is small and can be run by her alone. Each morning I arise from bed at three, and walk to the Koshenko farm, which is many kilometers from here. It takes me an hour to get there. On the morning of the hanging, I awoke promptly at three, as usual.

"I walked to work and got there at four. Farmer Koshenko and others can testify to the truth of everything I have told you. If my father was killed between four-thirty and five, I cannot possibly be thought of as a suspect."

"Then you believe your father was murdered?" I asked, interested.

The boy fell silent again, his eyes on his wrist watch. Mrs. Bogado glanced at her watch, too. I was decidedly irked. The whole village was time-crazy, it seemed.

I asked the woman :"Are you certain it was four-thirty when your husband woke you?"

"Very certain, sir," she replied, without hesitation. "We compared the time on our wrist watches."

I shook my head in bewilderment. "And what time did you find your husband dead?"

"About two seconds after five in the morning."

"What did you do immediately after that?"

"I went to fetch Constable Barto Bogado from the jailhouse. Barto is my dead husband's brother. He was shocked, naturally. He said it was like see-

ing himself dead, because Barto and my husband resembled each other very much. Then the constable made arrangements with the village undertaker. We buried Ezro yesterday."

"You only held a one-day wake, Mrs. Bogado? Why not the usual Catholic three days?"

"Barto said that Ezro had told him many times that he could not endure the thought of lying in a coffin for three days—gaped at by everyone in the village. One day was enough."

I shook my head. Something was wrong somewhere.

"You say your uncle called it suicide?" I asked the silent boy.

"Yes, sir," he replied, looking up quickly. "When I called up the newspaper to give them the news the editor said that many people commit suicide. He wanted to know if there was a story behind it. I told him there were strange circumstances surrounding my father's demise and so he sent a reporter here. But my uncle, the constable, told the reporter it was just suicide with nothing strange about it. I said to the reporter, 'My father always walked around bare-footed because he did not know how to tie shoe-laces.' The reporter thought it amusing and printed the story anyway."

"Why did you tell the reporter that?" I inquired patiently stifling a sudden desire to wring his bamboolike neck.

The boy grinned. "Let us go to see my uncle. He will tell you why . . ."

Constable Barto Bogado was a short, genial-looking man, curly-haired and stout. He wore a revolver around his waist tied to a thick Manila rope. His hands, I noticed, were thick and very rough. He was looking at his wrist watch when the boy and I came into the jail. As soon as Marcho had explained the reason for our visit he invited me to sit down.

"Glad to know you, Osco Brono," he said. "How can I help you?"

"By telling me of your brother's death," I said, my eyes on a belt and holster hanging on the wall.

I wanted to ask him why he wore the rope around his waist when strict law regulation made a holster obligatory. But I kept the question to myself.

"My brother took his own life," Barto Bogado said. "He had threatened to hang himself many times before, sir. You see, he hated his wife. She had grown too old and wrinkled too soon, and the whole village knew of his great discontent. But Ezro did a fine thing. Instead of killing her, he murdered himself. As you may have heard, sir, it is a Filippino tradition—proving he possessed a last vestige of respect for his ugly wife."

"I have never heard of such a

tradition," I said eying him steadily. "At any rate, I would like to know why you allowed your nephew to make such a disrespectful statement to a reporter?"

"About the shoe-laces?" the constable laughed a bit. "Marcho is an imaginative boy. He goes even further, Mr. Brono. He thinks he murdered his own father!"

I stared at the boy, speechless. Assuming a poker-face, Marcho looked at his wrist watch casually. The constable went on: "Marcho is living in a make-believe world of a strange sort. He is, after all, only a boy. I'm afraid, Mr. Brono, that your trip here will accomplish nothing. Despite what Marcho says, my brother Ezro committed suicide."

"I doubt very much that he did," I said, recovering my customary calmness. "The boy quite obviously knows something."

The constable shook his head. "He doesn't. Did you ever hear of the ancient Bulacano proverb, which says, 'Beware the silent stillness. But turn a deaf ear to idle speech?' "

"I have heard one of Leytian stock which goes: 'The wind blows not for nothing. Listen hard, for it speaks.' " I was staring at the badge under the constable's coat. Oddly enough, he wore it on his right side!

I refrained from asking him why he wore it on the wrong side, and said to the Filippino boy instead: "Your father was murdered between four-thirty and five. At four you were at work many kilometers away. It gives you a perfect alibi. Yet you dare defy the law by admitting you murdered your father. Why?"

The boy lowered his eyes, and said nothing.

The constable said: "I checked on Marcho's alibi, Mr. Brono. Farmer Koshenko and his three wives attest to it. The boy is entirely innocent of this."

"Take me to see farmer Koshenko," I said.

We traveled a half hour on a weary water-buffalo, with mud-caked, splintered horns. I was sweating in every pore when we arrived at the Koshenko rice farm and I was introduced to the farmer and his three wives.

Koshenko swore to me that on the Tuesday past, Marcho had arrived to work at four in the morning, and had never been out of his sight or the sight of the women while they toiled in the paddies together.

"We are not trying to cover up for the boy," Koshenko assured me. "I resent Filippino boys as much as you do, Mr. Brono. They are very mischievous. I make him work here only because his poor mother can use the money. My wives hate the boy, too. Marcho is always leering at them. He is maturing, you know. We ignore this because all

young boys allow their eyes to roam.

"But my other workers can't stand the sight of him, either. The boy is sneaky and plays many offensive tricks. Yet, on four that morning he was truly here. We can swear to it, as we always compare our wrist watches when we start out for the paddies."

Back at the constable's jail, we sat on the bamboo floor again. Barto Bogado said: "The boy deceives you, sir. If Ezro couldn't tie shoe-laces, how could he have hitched his water-buffalo every morning?"

"Hitching and knotting are two different things," I said, thoughtfully, my eyes hard on the boy's face. "A perfect crime is a very clever accomplishment, evil though it be. But there is one satisfaction that the successful perpertrator cannot enjoy—that of boasting. He must keep to himself the details of the crime itself. How can people give proper credit to such a fiend when they cannot even figure out how he performed the murder? Think of that!"

Marcho looked uneasy for the first time. But he quickly recovered himself and said: "No dice, Mr. Brono."

"Marcho," I said patiently. "Did anyone help you commit this crime? If someone did, then it never was a perfect crime."

Again the boy looked startled. I pounced on this. "Then someone *did* help you!"

The boy frowned, shrugged and said nothing. But his silence was answer enough for me. I began adding things up in my mind. I recalled what the constable had said about his brother's threat to hang himself because he hated his homely wife. It just didn't make sense. When a man hates his wife he looks around for another woman to love. Or he runs far away to escape being tormented. He resorts to murder only when his hatred reaches a nerve-shattering point.

Thus, someone was lying, and I was convinced it wasn't the boy.

"How long have you been constable, Barto Bogado?"

"A long time," he answered looking at his watch.

I pointed to his shoes. "They're untied," I said. "Also, your badge is on the wrong side and your regulation holster hangs on the wall instead of around your waist. Another thing, sir, you have the rough hands of a man who slaves at the rice paddies. Constables seldom get calluses at all—except on their trigger fingers. In other words, you are Ezro Bogado—and it was actually the constable who was found hanging in the barn!"

The dim-witted scoundrel reached for his revolver, but I drew mine much faster. "I'm quite sure you can draw quicker

with a rice-thresher," I told him. To Marcho I said: "Leave your hands where I can see them. And now we'll go to see Mrs. Bogado. I want to ask her a question—a very important one."

They got up without a word, and marched out.

We reached the little farmhouse in five minutes according to Marcho's watch. Mrs. Bogado was on the floor asleep.

"Maybe I do not have to question her, after all," I said. "I will try an experiment."

I bent down and changed the time on her wrist watch. She did not wake up. "She is apparently a heavy sleeper," I mused aloud. "It means, Mr. *Ezro* Bogado, that last Tuesday morning you changed the time on your wife's watch as she slept. You changed it from three in the morning to four-thirty. She didn't wake up. Then you deliberately woke her and told her it was four-thirty—when actually it was only three. Your wife looked at her watch, nodded dutifully and went back to sleep. Very cautiously you reached over and changed her watch back to three. She never knew the difference when she got up later.

"I say it must have been three in the morning because your son Marcho was wide awake and on his feet—to help you with the scheme. You did not know how to tie knots in a rope. But your son did. Then, somehow, you managed to kidnap Barto Bogado, the constable. You seized him at his jail and carried him to the barn where you hanged him!"

The man and boy said nothing. I looked at them, and nodded. "Your sleeping wife is an innocent woman. Also she is, I am convinced, highly emotional and credulous—perhaps just a little unbalanced mentally. You knew that she wouldn't be able to tell the difference between you and your murdered brother. She is not that clever. She is only a pitifully devoted and obedient woman. Why did you murder your brother, Ezro?"

"I am saying nothing," said the farmer bitterly.

I shrugged: "How would you like to be locked up in a jail, and compelled to wear shoes and iron-laces, for life?"

He looked frightened. "They —they will do that to me?"

"They will—if you do not confess. But if you tell the truth, your sentence will be greatly lessened. Maybe they will not even make you wear shoes in jail for many years."

"I will confess, then!" Ezro Bogado's shoulders slumped. "At this very moment I cannot bear the shoes I wear! Why did I do it! Why?" he sobbed.

"That's what I would like to know. You'll feel better if you tell me."

The farmer looked up from his weeping. "I killed Barto be-

cause he never had to work too hard as a constable, while I broke my back as a farmer. I was jealous. Also, it gave me a chance to get away from my wife. It was a clever idea which my son here read in a book."

The Filippino boy's eyes went to the floor. "That is true, sir. But I did not murder my uncle. I only made the knot, then went off to work. I thought I was being clever when I called up the Manila newspaper. Now I know I should have kept my mouth shut."

"You should have!" His father's hands balled into knots. "I warned you not to do anything rash. But because of your youth I forgive you. I was worse than you when I was a boy."

"Thank you, father," Marcho said.

"I am sorry," I told them, "but I will have to take you to Manila Headquarters and book you for the murder of Barto Bogado, the constable. What time does the next train leave Naguilian for Manila?"

Father and son consulted their watches. The boy replied: "We don't know, sir. We never rode on a train—only on water-buffaloes."

"Then you will enjoy the ride," I said. "The scenery along the way is quite beautiful. It will take your minds off your foolish wrist watches, for a change."

"Can I take off these shoes now?" begged the farmer.

"No," I replied. "We'll need them for evidence. You'll have to take them off on the train, however. Let's go."

Sitting comfortably manacled on the train, father and son, anticipated the long ride back with keenness. They talked a great deal on the way. Finally I found occasion to ask the boy, "What book did you get the idea for the murder from?"

Marcho shrugged. "I can't remember what it was called, sir. It was just an old comic book I found."

"A comic book!"

"Yes! Did you read it, too?"

I stared out the window. I refused to answer. I had read it many months ago. No wonder I had solved this murder so quickly.

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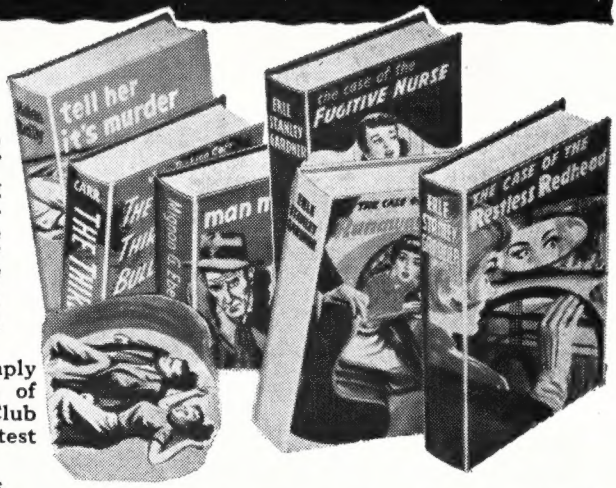

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